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"THEO FELL, WITH A SHARP CRY OF HORROR."

## HIS OWN AGAIN; OR, TRUST HER NOT. BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

### CHAPTER I.

"THE EVIL THAT MEN DO, LIVES AFTER THEM."  
AND so she was dead! the proud, haughty lady  
at the Castle, all Hale had feared, and bowed

down to, and made much of, and who had lorded  
it over them all in such a queenly style. She  
had gone to her long home at last, and now lay  
beneath the velvet canopy of her bed—helpless,  
inanimate!

Never again would her frown cause a fellow-  
creature to tremble; never again would a fellow-  
mortal writhe under the lash of her tongue. No;  
the poorest and the lowest need fear her no  
longer.

She was powerless now to do them harm; and



yet, "the evil that men do, lives after them." And, as Rupert Falconer sat in his study at Hale Castle, reading—utterly amazed, completely overpowered; indeed, stricken to the heart by the tidings it contained—the letter which, with her dying hand, his grandmother—the lady just deceased—had given him, this line recurred vividly to his remembrance.

The evil she had done!—yes; evil in truth. No wonder she had struggled so hard to speak; no wonder she had spent her last breath, her last energies in striving to make her grandson understand where this letter he now held was to be found, and to induce him to bring it to her. And he ceased to wonder at the last words, that with the utmost anxiety and a desperate effort he could not, at the moment, understand, she had uttered.

She faintly said, "Look in the Cedar Closet!—the third—" And then was unable to finish her sentence, ere death peremptorily stopped her breath forever.

He could well comprehend now to what those last words referred, and laying down the letter with a trembling hand, he seized a light, and, with hurried footsteps, left the room, and hastened to a distant part of the Castle; passing through long corridors, and winding passages; up wide oaken staircases; past suits of empty, tapestry-hung rooms; till he arrived at the upper apartment of a tower in the southern wing of the building, and mounting a last flight of stone steps, found himself in a curious, octagonal-shaped room.

It was furnished with ancient, heavy, oak furniture, and to all appearance had not been entered for many a day.

The ponderous key turned with a grating noise in the rusty lock, and a cloud of dust arose as Rupert pushed it open and looked around the gloomy room.

The Cedar Closet—where was it? Could it be here? He was puzzled for a moment, and then his eye caught a half-fallen piece of tapestry, and behind it he perceived a door, which he thought might be that of the closet he was in search of.

Hastily he attempted to open it; but it was locked. He looked around the half-dark apartment, and gave an involuntary shudder.

Where could the key of that door be, he wondered? Probably in his grandmother's room. And then suddenly he remembered how he had seen her, in her last moments, thrust her hand beneath her pillow, and search eagerly for something. Might it not have been for this very key? And abruptly he turned away, and retraced his steps to the inhabited portion of the building, the heavy oaken doors slamming behind him with a solemn echoing sound.

As he reached the door of the dead woman's chamber, he paused a moment, with his hand on the lock. No one knew his grandmother's

secret but himself; why should he not destroy the letter she had left behind her, and bury it forever in oblivion? But no, no! he *could* not; and, resolutely, he turned the handle, and entered.

Two tall candles burned at the foot of the bed where the deceased lay.

Gently the young man approached and turned the covering down, and revealed the face of the deceased. It was stern and fixed, the well-cut features seeming as if hewn out of white marble; and as he looked at her and thought of the letter she had left behind her, he shuddered again, and the temptation to destroy it, and to leave things as they were, almost overcame his previous resolution, and he was about to leave the room without further search, when a sudden gust of wind moaned and hurried round the Castle, causing the candles to flicker; and in the changeful light, the overwrought young man could fancy a frown had gathered on the brow of that motionless form.

As he had dreaded that frown in life, so the shadow of it in death mastered him, and hurriedly he glided his hand beneath the pillow on which the head of the departed reposed, and searched about for what he felt more than half certain was concealed there. Nor was he deceived. In a moment more the touch of metal rewarded his endeavors, and he drew forth from its hiding-place a small, curiously-formed key.

"I will do your bidding, though it is hard—very hard!" he muttered. "Rest in peace." And with a last look at the stony features before him he turned away, and slowly and with drooping head left the chamber.

He returned at once to the octagon room in the old tower, and in a few moments the door that had baffled him was opened, and he stood within the Cedar Closet.

It was a small apartment, some six feet square, wainscoted in cedar wood, from whence, doubtless, it derived its name.

In one corner stood a high-backed chair, of old, black oak; beside it, a small table, on which lay, piled in confusion, letters and papers, together with a few books; and on the wall hung a costly robe, in the olden style, of brocaded silk.

Rupert searched quickly through the papers that were before him, but the document of which he was in quest was not among them; and again brought to a standstill, he paused; and then the two last words of Mrs. Falconer recurred to him—"The third!" The third what?

He looked round. The walls were paneled; might there not be some secret hiding-place in the cedar wainscoting wherein his great uncle's will—for it was for that he sought—might have been hidden?



Carefully he felt along each row of curiously-wrought panels, till at last one seemed to yield to his touch—the third from the door in the third row from the ground; and presently it slid back from beneath his hand and disclosed a niche, and within it lay a document, which Rupert seized, not doubting for a moment but that his great-uncle's will—his true will—was now in his hands.

Returning to the study, he took up his grandmother's letter and read it once more through.

"Rupert," it began, "I cannot die without confessing my crime. I could not rest in peace in my grave if I left this world without making restitution for the wrong I have done. Though we have not lived on good terms together, you will, I know, do me the justice to believe that no ill-feeling toward you has dictated this tardy reparation of the wrong I did years ago. Rupert, you are not the lawful owner of Hale Castle. Your great uncle—my brother—left it to his nephew, Kenrick Falconer—not to my husband, Ernest Falconer, his cousin. I forged the will that was proved at his death, and hid the true one—"

Here the letter broke off abruptly; but Rupert had no need to be told more now. He held the legal will in his hand.

It was a shock, a heavy blow to him, poor fellow! He had been brought up at Hale Castle, and from his early days, when his own father died, had been its master. He loved the beautiful old place dearly, and the idea of its being no longer his was a bitter grief to him; far more bitter than the thought that he was now a beggar, and must work for his own livelihood, and make his own way in the world, like others.

Ah! why had his grandmother done this thing? Not for *his* sake, he knew, for, as she said, there had not existed any great affection between them. But the old lady had idolized her son, his father, had never forgiven him his marriage with a poor and comparatively unknown girl, and, at his death, had half broken her heart, and passed years of remorse, brooding over the estrangement which had separated them forever.

It was for him she had done it; and the punishment had fallen on the children's children.

Rupert's head sunk on the table, and for a moment he felt as if the whole thing were too hard to be borne. Why should the innocent suffer for the guilty? Why should he be made wretched, and his life be ruined, by the crime of another?

And then again the temptation to destroy the document before him, or, at any rate, to return it to its hiding-place, and to hold his tongue on the matter, assailed him; but he fought manfully against it.

"No, no! I will not! It is not mine by right. I will not keep it. I cannot stoop to a crime. I will put the will into Roger's hands to-morrow, together with her letter; and if he

says it is genuine, why,"—and he looked around sadly—"I must go, and make way for my betters—that's all."

And then he fell to thinking what manner of man his successor would be.

"A thorough Yankee, probably, by this time," he thought. "Let's see. Fenwick Falconer went over to America, and married. Jonathan, his son, must be a man of about eight-and-forty now, and he has an American wife and a family, I believe. Well, it's little matter to me what they are like; the dear old place is mine no longer. I have always been a usurper here—nothing better." And with sad, wistful eyes, he looked round the well-known room, and then, suddenly bursting into tears, buried his face in his hands, and sobbed like a child.

Next day a large funeral cortege left the Castle, and the body of the grim old woman, before whom all had trembled, and whose life, as it now seemed, had been a long lie, was laid in its last resting-place in Hale Church.

Groups of curious gazers stood as it slowly passed, and whispered to each other, with bated breath, as the hearse, with its waving plumes and stately horses, rolled solemnly by. But none of all the many who had known her as lady of the manor from the days of her early youth, when Ernest Falconer had brought her, a proud, cold bride, to the Castle, dropped a tear as her body was taken to its grave. None followed to see the last rites performed over it save the paid mourners and the family party from Hale.

Rupert stood by the open vault, stern, and cold, and tearless, and when all was over, returned to the Castle, where the family lawyer, by his desire, was awaiting him.

He seated himself with a deep sigh, at the table in the library, and for a moment was silent, lost in thought. Then, turning to the lawyer, he began:

"I have a strange tale to tell you. I am not the lawful possessor of Hale."

"Not the lawful possessor of Hale, Mr. Rupert—Mr. Falconer, I mean!" cried the old man, in profound astonishment. "Why, what do you mean, sir?"

"Just what I say, my dear sir," he replied. "Read that!" And he put Mrs. Falconer's confession into the lawyer's hand.

The old man was greatly troubled as he read.

"But the will—the will!" he cried. "What proof is there of what she says? She was ill. Her mind may have been affected."

The lawyer looked at Rupert inquiringly. He had been the legal adviser of Rupert's father, and also of his grand-uncle, and remembered well how, before the old man died, he had given him to understand that his cousin, Fenwick Falconer, would be his heir, and of



the astonishment that fell on him when, on the reading of the will after his death, it was found that, after all, Ernest Falconer was left possessor of all the Hale property.

Not that the will was considered an unjust one by the lawyer, or by any of the family, but that the old man had been proud and obstinate, and had a way, when he once made a resolution, of sticking to it through thick and thin, that caused those who knew him well to feel a little surprised that he should so secretly and suddenly have altered his intentions.

Possibly, Mrs. Ernest Falconer might have influenced him in the matter; for she was a strong-minded, strong-willed woman, and, it was easy to see, kept her uncle not a little in awe of her.

So that though the world in general was surprised at the contents of the old man's will, no one for a moment dreamed of questioning its legality, nor suspected the existence of another testament.

"Nay," returned Rupert, sadly; "I have found the will. It is here—look!" and he gave the document to Mr. Rogers.

The old man examined the will carefully through and through, and at last was reluctantly forced to admit that there seemed no reason to doubt its authenticity.

"And she told you where to find it?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Rupert. "She put it there years ago, I have no doubt. As a girl, that room was her favorite retreat; but I have heard Mrs. Bland, the old housekeeper, say that she gave it up shortly after my grand-uncle's death, and since then it has been unused.

"And if this should turn out a true will," began Mr. Rogers, "the estate will go—"

"To my cousin, Jonathan Falconer," he replied; "and his lawyers are Cutbush and Skinner, of Lincoln's Inn. Write to them directly. I must give over the property to its rightful owner at once."

## CHAPTER II.

### AN AMERICAN COUSIN.

Two months have elapsed since old Mrs. Falconer died, and left her confession in her grandson's hands—two months that have passed sadly enough to Rupert.

He has been up and down to London many times, passing long hours in the dismal offices of Messrs. Cutbush and Skinner, and in the hardly more cheerful rooms of Mr. Rogers.

He has received many visits of condolence from friends and acquaintances, some of whom have called out of mere curiosity; some because they considered it the correct thing to do; a few—a very few—to rejoice over him in his adversity; but the greater number out of honest sympathy and affection; for Rupert

was as much beloved by those around him as his grandmother had been feared, and there was a universal feeling of regret at the misfortune that had befallen him. Gentry, tenantry and villagers all felt that they were losing a good friend and master, and were not prepared to regard the new proprietor of Hale Castle—a Yankee, who knew nothing of English habits and ways, albeit his ancestors were Falconers—with any favor.

"What will he be like, I wonder?" sighed Lady Rowley to Mrs. Roy Vincent, of The Firs. "It is a misfortune for the county, this sad business at Hale!"

"Yes, indeed!" returned Mrs. Roy Vincent. "Such a charming fellow as he is, such a rider and dancer, and such a delightful host. Hale would have been the most charming house in R—shire when Mr. Falconer had settled down with a nice wife—and that he certainly would have done soon."

"Yes!" sighed Lady Rowley, who had two pretty daughters growing up, one of whom she had hoped to see some day the mistress of Hale. "And now no one knows who this American branch may bring into the county and introduce into society! It is really terrible! And what is Mr. Falconer going to do himself?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Roy Vincent. "Roy tells me he talks of leaving England altogether. Mr. Jonathan Falconer (think what a name—Jonathan, my dear!) is to be here next week, and then he will have to go, poor fellow! I do pity him from my heart!"

And a week later Mr. Jonathan Falconer, the new master of the Castle, did arrive in England, and made his first acquaintance with the land of his forefathers, after a long and stormy voyage across the broad Atlantic.

Rupert was at the Castle, and all was in readiness for Mr. Falconer's reception; and as his carriage rolled up the broad drive leading to the Castle gate, the servants assembled in the hall to welcome their new lord; and Rupert and Mr. Rogers stood at the top of the flight of steps leading up to the great door, ready to greet him.

A tall, thin, wiry, but nevertheless handsome man was Mr. Jonathan Falconer, spite of the small ragged beard and long, straggling mustache which clothed the lower part of his face, and the loose, ill-made garments where-with he was clad. A Falconer, too, he evidently was by his open brow and clearly-cut features, if but a foreign edition of the family; and his voice had an honest, clear ring in it, spite of the twang with which (to the ears of the Hale folk) his speech was disfigured.

"You are Rupert Falconer, I guess?" he said, shaking Rupert warmly by the hand; "and this is Mr. Rogers, of course! Well, cousin—for we are cousins, though distant ones



—I'm sorry to disturb you here; but, still, I'm only taking what's my own, you see. Ah! these are my servants—helps we call 'em!"

And he nodded to the domestics, and then followed Rupert, with long, swinging strides, through the hall, his restless black eyes noting everything as he passed—from the soft Turkey carpet on the floor of the corridor to the portraits and suits of old armor on the walls,—till they entered the large drawing-room, which was thrown open for the first time on that evening since Mrs. Falconer's death, and which, brilliantly lighted and decorated with flowers, was a picture of perfect taste and costly luxury.

"Ah!" he said, seating himself, on a luxurious couch, and looking round; "this isn't so bad! I've no taste for your grim, tumble-down old places, cousin. I go in for modern comfort and matter-of-fact *versus* medieval discomfort and romance; but this combines the two—really, it does! The old lady had good taste, at any rate! My girls would like this immensely!"

And he surveyed the magnificent old room admiringly.

Rupert was silent.

The American glanced at him quickly, and saw plainly enough what was passing in his cousin's mind.

"Well," he continued, "you've no cause to love her, though she was your grandmother. She has treated you worse—ay, far worse than she has treated me! 'Pon honor, I feel for you, sir!"

Rupert bowed. He saw his cousin meant to be kind, and tried not to feel hurt at his off-hand manner.

"Would you like to see through the place?" he asked, wishing to avoid a conversation with him at the present moment.

"Well, yes; I reckon I would. Will you show me round, cousin?" he replied, putting his arm through Rupert's. "I might get lost in this rambling old place without a guide!"

And he laughed; and Rupert led him from room to room, and from corridor to corridor, while Mr. Rogers told him the history of this picture and that apartment, and related to him various legends connected with the Castle and its former owners, to all of which he listened with rapt attention.

"By Jove, cousin Rupert," he said, comically, when the old man had finished, "I shall never have courage to inhabit this old pile alone! I shall be afraid to go about in the dark by myself, like a little child, after all these tales! Why, there is not a room in the house wherein some ancestor or another hasn't died or been killed, or where a ghost isn't to be found, or a mysterious sound to be heard! My girls would never stand it! They'd be in never-ending

hysterics, they would! Guess I prefer a spic and span new homestead for every-day use!"

And he screwed up his face with a quiet expression of fun.

"Well, and where was the will found?" he asked, suddenly.

Rupert started. His thoughts were far away.

"Come with me, and I will show you," he said. "It was in the oldest part of the Castle."

And he led the way toward the tower.

"Ah, dear me! what a gloomy old hole!" cried Jonathan. "Makes my flesh creep, it does! And this was the old lady's favorite room when she was a girl! Fancy *my* girls taking this for their favorite room! Ha, ha!" And he laughed till the old walls rung and echoed with the unwonted sound. "And this is the closet, is it?" he continued.

And, stooping down, he entered the little wainscoted apartment.

Curiously and carefully he examined the woodwork, tapped the panels as if to ascertain whether there might not be other hiding-places concealed between them, sat down in the great oak chair, and, finally, rising again, and declaring that never had he been in a room that so entirely realized his idea of everything ghostly and depressing, made his way to the door again.

"Gad! I should be inclined to destroy my self if I were shut up here for long!" he cried. "Come away, Cousin Rupert! At any rate, you can't be sorry to say good-by to this dismal hole!"

And he left the tower hurriedly.

Dinner passed off well enough. Jonathan Falconer and Mr. Rogers kept up a continual flow of conversation, and Rupert could not but observe how cleverly the American extracted from the old lawyer all the information he wished to gain without putting a single direct question to him, and how careful he was not to let the old man perceive how much more he had let out on certain subjects than he otherwise would have done—small particulars of Mrs. Falconer's ways and habits—of Rupert's youth, and bringing up, and past life—of the friends of the family, and of the people round about; and an amused smile had gathered on Jonathan's countenance when, rising, and declaring himself weary with his journey, he prepared to retire to bed.

"I will say good-by, then, now, cousin," said Rupert. "You probably will not be up when I leave the Castle to-morrow morning."

"You leave the Castle to-morrow morning!" said Jonathan, in surprise; "and Mr. Rogers to-night! But why? I tell you I'm afraid to be left alone here!" And a comical look spread itself over his face again; and then he added, seriously, "Come, Rupert, spare me a day or so! It's hardly cousinly to leave me so abruptly. I shall fear you bear me ill-will."



"Oh, if I can be of any service to you—" began Rupert, in a hesitating voice.

It was pain to him—bitter pain—to be in the old place, and its master no longer.

The American saw it well.

"Yes you can be of use to me, my boy," he returned, kindly. "Maybe we can help each other not a little. Stay. I've a word or two to say to you. Is it settled?"

And he darted a sharp glance at the young man.

"Certainly," replied Rupert, still with a shade of reluctance and embarrassment in his voice, which Jonathan saw but did not heed.

"That's right!" he answered, cheerfully. "Now let's be off to bed—and to sleep, if the ghosts will let us!"

And he left the room.

"A fine young fellow that!" he mused, as he paced slowly up and down his bedchamber. "I like the look of him. Honest and true he is, I bet! Bears no malice, and is quite ready to set me going all right and comfortable here. The old lady must have been a bad one. She's done the boy an ill turn. What does he mean to be up to, I wonder? I must find out; and help him; and if he doesn't get on it will be his fault, not mine!"

And so saying, the kind-hearted fellow turned in, and was soon sleeping peacefully beneath the roof of his forefathers.

Rupert, after seeing Mr. Rogers off to the station, retired to his own room for, as he imagined, the last time.

His own room? Why, it was his no more; and he looked sadly at the portmanteau and traveling-bag ready packed for his departure on the morrow.

The room, denuded of his guns, and fishing-rods, and favorite pictures, looked cheerless and dilapidated.

"I sha'n't start to-morrow, Jarvis," he said to the man who had always been his personal attendant, and who came as usual to his room to ask his orders before retiring for the night. "Mr. Falconer has asked me to remain for a day or so. He has business to talk to me about, it seems. Good-night, Jarvis!"

And he turned away with a sigh.

But Jarvis did not stir.

"I don't want anything more," said Rupert, looking round after a moment, and seeing the man still there. "It's late, Jarvis; you can go to bed. What is it? Have you anything to say?—anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, sir—yes, Mr. Rupert—there be!" returned the man. "Oh, sir, I can't leave you!—I can't bear to stop here when you have to go! I've no heart to serve this stranger! Take me with you, Mr. Rupert! I don't care for—for wages. I've—I've saved; I'm pretty well off! Take me with you, sir!"

"My good fellow," replied Rupert, the tears

coming into his eyes, "what you ask is impossible! I've no home—not a farthing—nowhere to take you to! I shall have to fight my way in the world."

"But let me be with you, Mr. Rupert! I don't mind hard work—no, nor foreign lands, sir! I may be useful to you. Try me, sir! Don't send me away from you!" replied the man, imploringly.

But Rupert shook his head.

"It cannot be, Jarvis. Stay here, and do your duty by my cousin, my good fellow; and when—if I am ever—in a position to employ you again, be sure I will do so only too gladly. Now, good-night!"

"Good-night, sir!" replied the man, sorrowfully; and left the room.

And Rupert felt keenly his inability to keep the faithful fellow near him, and grieved to think how his ill-fortune affected those about him as well as himself.

"I should be thankful that I have not a family to be brought, like myself, to poverty by this unexpected turn of the wheel of fortune," he mused. "It is sad enough to be obliged to send away that good fellow there, and to feel that my misfortune injures him too. But if I had a wife and children my lot would be much harder; or if I were engaged to any young girl, and saw ourselves compelled to separate. Well, I might be worse off, after all, than I am. I'm young, and strong, and free; I must not complain. It's only leaving the old place and the old friends that hurts me."

And as he lay thinking over the events of the past six weeks, he could hardly realize that, perhaps, never again would he sleep beneath the roof that had sheltered him from childhood and that once away from England, it might be years, maybe nearly his whole lifetime, ere he would return to his native land.

And the old clock in the tower, whose solemn tones he knew so well, struck two ere sleep fell on Rupert Falconer's eyelids.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A FRIEND IN NEED.

EARLY as Rupert rose next morning, Jonathan Falconer was abroad before him, and had been up and about the place since sunrise, much to the surprise of the servants, and the consternation of the gardeners and helpers, who, on leaving their beds, discovered their new master pacing up and down the terrace overlooking the park, with a moody, thoughtful brow. It was but seven o'clock as the head gardener made his appearance on the lawn, but Margery, the housemaid, vowed she had heard footsteps descending the grand staircase more than two hours before, and long ere any human being could be supposed to be at work, and the small door into the garden opened—



doubtless by the new master, before the sun was well above the horizon. Such strange, new-fangled ways met with but scant approval from the Castle domestics.

Jonathan Falconer, tired at length by his monotonous walk, leaned thoughtfully against the gray old wall that formed the parapet of the terrace, and his looks roamed over the landscape before him with a dreamy, sad expression.

What good was it all to him, and who would come after him? These were the thoughts that passed through his mind, and troubled him sorely. Yes, one deep grief, one gnawing sorrow, filled his heart as he gazed at the fair scene before him—who would inherit all this grand domain at his death? And his brow darkened as the image of a shabby, dissipated, reckless-looking youth rose up before him, the image of his son, as he had last seen him some six years before, and when, with an aching, breaking heart, he forbade him his house, and cast him out of his home and affections for ever.

What had become of him since? Where was he? Jonathan knew not. He had watched over him tenderly in childhood, brought him up carefully, but too indulgently; had forgiven him many and many a time his undutiful and ungrateful conduct, till at length even the fond father's love was worn out, and his son—his only son—had become unto him as a stranger.

Wild tales of his evil doings for a while reached the poor father's ears, and then all traces of the prodigal were lost, and for five long years Jonathan had had no tidings of him.

He looked at Rupert, whose tall, manly figure he perceived advancing toward him; and thought, with a sigh, "Ah! if Elwood had only been like him, yes, *he* would be a son to be proud of. Bother the old lady! Why could she not have let that will molder away and be forgotten forever in its hiding-place? I didn't want the property. It won't suit me to live here—it would never do for me. If Elwood comes into it he'll ruin the estate in no time. Rupert, there, was the man for it, not me. He'd have married well, and kept up the position of the family, and been a fine old English gentleman all the days of his life, and have left a son worthy to succeed him. Ah! if my boy were but like him!"

And he sighed again, and advanced with outstretched hand to meet Rupert.

"Good-morning, cousin," he cried, cheerily. "You see I can't get out of my New World habits all at once. I'm up with the lark and out every morning of my life at home; and so I've begun the same here, and have been looking round a bit. A fine view from this spot now, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Rupert, with a smile;

and there was a silence while the two men leaned over the parapet, and looked out over the glorious landscape before them.

"You're well up in farming, I guess?" remarked Jonathan, in a few moments.

"Pretty fairly, I believe," replied Rupert.

"Understand horses?" he continued.

Rupert nodded.

"Yes; that's quite in my line," he replied.

"A good hunter and a fine shot you are, I make no doubt?" continued the American.

"Up in sheep, too, perhaps, eh?"

"Well, I'm not a bad judge of live-stock, I believe," replied Rupert. "At least, so the farmers about say. I thought it my duty at one time to do my best to understand these things," and his face fell.

"Just so—quite right!" replied Jonathan, nodding; "and all knowledge is useful. It keeps, and if it's not wanted it's easily carried, as they say, and turns to use invariably at some odd time or another. Well, and what do you think of doing with yourself?" And he looked at him keenly.

"Doing with myself?" said Rupert, with a little hesitation in his voice. "Well, I thought of trying Australia. I have heard that a man who does not mind hard work may generally get on there."

"Yes," returned Jonathan; I believe it is so; and when do you think of going?"

"There's a steamer going out next week," replied Rupert. "I thought of taking a second-class passage in her, and going over at once."

Jonathan nodded, and mused a bit; then, suddenly turning to Rupert, and laying his hand on his arm, said, in a voice full of emotion, "Hark ye, Rupert Falconer! I've taken a fancy to you. I wish I had a son like you. Don't go to Australia. Stay here, and manage the estate for me."

"What! stay here at Hale?" cried Rupert, in surprise.

"Yes, at Hale," returned Jonathan.

Rupert's face fell.

"I couldn't do it, cousin," he replied, in a low voice. "You are very good to make me the offer. I know you mean it kindly, but I couldn't, after—after—"

"Say no more, my boy—say no more," cried Jonathan. "Yes, yes—I quite understand. I see, it couldn't be; we must think of something else for you." And there was a silence again of a few minutes between them.

"You don't mind hard work, you say?" resumed Jonathan, in a few minutes. "Well, I've thought of a place; but it is hard work there, and no mistake. Listen! I've bought a lot of land—a bit down south of our place at home. It wants clearing; it wants draining; it wants cultivating; it wants—everything. But when it's done, why, it will make Jona-



than Falconer about the richest man in those parts. Will you be my manager there, cousin? You'll find it a bit lonely at first; your nearest neighbors, barring your own men, twenty miles or so off, and your next forty or fifty, or may be more; but I believe you're the man for the place, cousin."

"You're very good," returned Rupert, taken quite by surprise. "I—I must think it over."

"Take your time—take your time, cousin," he answered, gayly. "I can wait, I guess; and as to terms, why—"

"As to that part of it," returned Rupert, hastily, "I leave all to you. Yes, cousin; I will accept your offer, and become your manager in America, and thank you heartily, though I could not have taken the same post here."

"All right, then; that's a bargain. Shake hands on it," cried Jonathan, joyfully; and he pressed the young man's hand warmly in his. "I'm glad to have you for my man, cousin!"

"And I'm glad to have you for my master, sir," replied Rupert, cordially. Jonathan looked gratified.

"And now as to terms," he continued. "There's only one stipulation I have to make with you, and that is—but I hope I sha'n't offend you by naming it, though—it is that for the present you should change your name. I don't care that the people out there should know you are my relation. It would be better for us both they did not, and—"

"Yes, yes!" replied Rupert, sadly. "It will be far best for me to take another name. I don't wish to—"

"I'm glad you think it will be best," interrupted Jonathan, quickly, as if wishing to hurry away from the subject. "Then *that's* settled. What will you call yourself?"

"Halsham—Rupert Halsham," said the young man after a pause. "My mother was a Halsham, you know?"

"Ah, true! I had forgotten that—Lord Derry's niece, to be sure. Well, then, I'll write to-day, and tell them out there at Savahana to expect you. Can you start right away, cousin—on Thursday, now? Boat sails on Thursday, you know?"

"I'm ready, sir," answered Rupert; "and if you'll give me my instructions, I'll be off."

"Come along, then, and we'll have a talk, and I'll tell you all about it," replied the American. "A glorious piece of country, cousin—all hills and dells and undulating pasture, fed with never-failing streams. Too much forest about, though, and too many marshes—wants clearing; but the timber will pay, for the river will float it down to Greens-town; and the land, sir, will grow cotton, maize, tobacco—anything you please. I'll write you full instructions of all I wish to be done, and the old manager, a good fellow, but

too old for the work—he's going to retire to his own clearing now—will give you all the help he can at first, I know. So I guess you'll soon be comfortably fixed, cousin."

And for two or three hours, and for long after the breakfast had been discussed and cleared away, did Jonathan and Rupert pore over the plans of the great Savahana estate, and the one expound, and the other listen to, all the plans for its cultivation and laying out that its fortunate owner entertained. Jonathan's natural acuteness and aptitude for business struck Rupert no less than did the delicate generosity of his dealings with him in regard to money. He treated him, as Rupert told him, right royally, made him supreme head and master of everything on the estate, and left all his plans to be carried out and modified to suit unforeseen events, according to the discretion and judgment of the young man.

"Guess I know what sort you are," he remarked, dryly, when Rupert hinted at his own inexperience. "You'll learn fast enough, my boy. In a couple of months you'll do more for me than another could do in six; and I can trust you, and that beats all other considerations. So *that's* settled!"

And with a sigh of relief he rose from the table, pushed the plans and papers aside, and walked out into the garden again, lighting his cigar, and putting on his broad-brimmed straw hat as he did so.

"By the way," he said, carelessly, "you'll be wanting an outfit, cousin. Here's a check for a hundred and fifty to start with. Buy a good gun or two; you'll want them."

And he sauntered off, hardly stopping to listen to Rupert's thanks; but, giving him a kindly smile and a wave of the hand, as he strode away across the smooth, soft turf.

"A good, kind-hearted fellow that," mused Rupert, as he watched the tall figure of the American disappear among the bushes in the garden. "He has done me a right good turn. I hope I shall be able to give him satisfaction. He's a fellow one need not be ashamed to work for, though I could not have done it here. No, I could not have stayed here in the dear old Castle and known that it was mine no longer."

And so Rupert set to work to pack his few remaining belongings, and next morning bade adieu to Jonathan Falconer and Hale Castle, and set off to London, where for two or three days he was busily employed getting the requisite outfit for his voyage to the New World, and the life he looked forward to leading there; and then, after paying a few farewell visits to particular friends in London and bidding them good-by, he went on board the American steamer *Viga* at Liverpool, and started on his voyage to his new home.

And Jonathan was left alone in the old Castle, and very dull he found it; but by degrees



the county families made his acquaintance, and were soon obliged to confess that if Jonathan Falconer was not quite the style of man they had been accustomed to see at the Castle, at any rate he was not so black as their imagination had painted him; and soon they began to allow that, in spite of his American ways, there was really something very attractive and agreeable about him, and that, after all, Hale Castle had not fallen into such very bad hands. Yet, for all that, Rupert was still remembered and regretted by every one.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### WESTWARD HO!

THE Viga steamed rapidly over the broad Atlantic, and Rupert reached his destination; and before many weeks had passed was hard at work among the great forests, clearing away the timber and brushwood that clothed the virgin soil; draining impassable swamps, damming up streams, and diverting watercourses, and sending hundreds of gigantic trees to be floated down by the great river that runs through the Savahana estate to the nearest settlement. And as time went on, the wilderness was converted into a smiling, cultivated territory.

Where the bush had been but a few months before so thick as to form an impenetrable barrier to the passage of man, now lay fields of springing wheat and maize; where impassable swamps had once spread themselves, flourished fields of tobacco and young cotton trees.

Here and there lay dotted about log-huts and cabins, surrounded by newly-planted gardens; and the first beginnings of the township of Savahana, or Falconberg, as Rupert suggested it should be named, were speedily rising where a couple of years before no mortal foot had ever set itself. And soon, when a few more months had passed, homesteads and farms sprung up here and there, and the township increased street after street, beside the smooth, flowing river, that already turned the wheels of more than one large mill.

Sheep fed upon the hills, and herds of cattle grazed in the verdant meadows, and Rupert's task was well-nigh at an end.

Jonathan Falconer was a rich man indeed.

Rupert had seen nothing of his cousin since he parted from him in England. He had heard from him often during his two years of toil—now from Hale, now from London, and later on from his American home.

His enterprise had succeeded, thanks to Rupert; and he wrote to say that after his two years and more of hard work, he felt certain his cousin must need a change; and the last letter received from Jonathan urged him to take a run for a few months and refresh himself by a peep at civilization again, and a visit to his

own land, if he felt so inclined; and Rupert, nothing loth, accepted his cousin's proposal.

How strange it seemed, returning once more to the old ways and the old country!

When Rupert found himself again in the familiar London streets, he could hardly realize all that had taken place since he had last beheld them. And, as he glanced in the looking-glass, he felt sure no one would recognize Rupert Falconer in the bronze-bearded man whose image it reflected.

Better so, he thought. He had but come on a passing visit to his native land, and would prefer not to be recognized by his former friends, and so decided to keep to his adopted name, and to be known for the time being only as Mr. Halsham.

It was not many days ere he tired of the heat and bustle and noise of London, and found himself at a little watering-place in Dorsetshire, where, as a child, he remembered to have gone with his parents, and which had left an impression never to be effaced on his childish mind.

Time, he found, had changed the little village into a flourishing sea-side resort; but it was yet far from a railroad, and had escaped the misfortune of becoming fashionable. And although the village had grown into a town, the country road was unchanged, and just as he remembered it as a child.

"Who is that fine-looking man, Theo?" whispered a tall, fair girl, to her sister, as they sat together on the beach at Seacombe. "A stranger, I declare! What a blessing to see a new face in this stupid little town! What induced father to take a house for us here, of all places, I can't imagine! All my beautiful Paris dresses are just wasted. There's nobody to see them here. There! he's gone down to speak to Tom, the boatman. Look, Theo!—do look! What are you thinking about?"

Theo raised a pair of dark, shy, dreamy eyes from the book she was reading, and turned a bonny face to her sister.

"Where, Bettina? I wasn't looking. What! Who are you speaking of?"

"The stranger! Why, Theo, you never notice any one, I declare! You sit here all day, buried in those stupid books of yours, and never notice anything. Look now! Here he is, coming back!"

And Theo looked up, and her eyes met those of Rupert Falconer.

She dropped them shyly, and he passed on, wondering who the owner of the sweet, dark orbs might be.

"What a handsome man!" sighed Bettina. "I wish we knew him; we should not feel half so dull then. There's really no one worth speaking to in this place. I hate it!"

"Why, Bettina, we've only been here a



week. Are you tired of it so soon? I find it charming!" replied Theo, wonderingly.

"Tired of it!" cried Bettina, indignantly. "Tired of it! What is there to like in it, in the name of wonder, Theo? But you're such a child. Picking up shells, and wandering about the lanes, satisfies *you*, of course; but *I* really can't get on without society and companionship, and there's positively no one in the place."

"Well, dear," replied Theo, sweetly, "of course it's different for you; and I dare say you find it dull without Gustave."

"Oh, Theo! Theo!" cried Bettina, in a voice of reproach. "Do you really think I am a girl of that sort? Do you really imagine I am like one of the heroines of your sentimental novels, and because I happen to be engaged to Gustave Van Bolt can't be happy away from him, or take an interest in any one else? I'm positively hurt at you, Theo."

"No; but, Bettina, dear," replied Theo, in surprise, "of course, I didn't mean that. Of course, you, who are so clever and pretty, enjoy society, and going out much more than a stupid little thing like me. But, still, you will be glad to see poor Gustave, won't you?"

"Poor Gustave! I don't see why you should pity him, Theo, I'm sure. I'm not such a bad match for him, anyhow. I think him a lucky fellow, now."

"So I think, too, Bettina," laughed Theo. "Come, don't be cross! Let's take a walk till dinner-time. I'm tired of sitting here, too."

"Well, if you like," said Bettina, but half appeased. "Come this way, then." And she set off in the direction the stranger had taken. "Perhaps we shall meet him as he comes back," she said.

"Meet him!—who? Oh, the stranger! Yes; I dare say we shall, Bettina. I'm sure I hope so," she added, hastily, "if you wish it." And she tripped on cheerfully beside her stately sister.

What a contrast the two girls presented! Bettina, with her tall, graceful, haughty figure, and perfectly-formed features, and large blue eyes; and Theo, small, delicately formed, and a decided brunette.

One could scarcely pass without noticing the strange difference between the sisters.

They walked along the sands for some distance till they reached a cove, backed by a steep cliff, clothed with brushwood and bushes almost to its summit, and over which fell a tiny stream, which then flowed across the yellow sand into the sea.

"How tired I am!" sighed Bettina, seating herself on the rock. "Let us rest here a little, Theo."

"Yes, Bettina. You sit here, and I'll go and explore the wood there," she answered. And as Bettina made no reply, she started off toward the cliff.

Bettina sat wearily looking out over the smooth, blue sea, turning round and round the costly rings with which her delicate white fingers were loaded, listlessly; examining now and then critically a magnificent diamond hoop—a recent gift of her adoring Gustave Van Bolt, a rich merchant of Boston—and thinking how dull it was at Seacombe, and how different her life should be when she bade adieu to England, and became Mrs. Van Bolt.

She had met Van Bolt in Paris about a year before, where he quickly fell a victim to the charms of this fair, elegant girl; and as he was known to be immensely rich, and to possess one of the finest houses in Boston, besides a country residence close to one of the most fashionable American watering-places in the Southern States, Bettina regarded him with no little favor, and permitted his attentions with a graceful condescension, which, had it not been so very graceful, would have been almost ridiculous. But, rich as he was, Bettina really thought that, to be her favored lover, was quite a distinction for any man.

And when Gustave Van Bolt laid his heart and hand and riches at her feet, after a little hesitation and shilly-shallying she accepted them, with an air of one conferring a favor, and with a species of resignation to circumstances that made cute observers smile.

Gustave Van Bolt, however, who loved her truly for herself, was far too delighted at his good fortune to cavil at the lady's manner of accepting him.

He would have married her there and then had she been willing, and made her mistress of his vast wealth at once; but Bettina professed to be shocked at the idea of such haste.

Her feelings, she said, would not permit her to leave her family so suddenly; the fact being that she had set her heart on seeing more of Europe, and spending at least one more season in London before going over to America.

So poor Van Bolt had to agree to her returning to England with her father, while he crossed the seas again, alone and dejected, to work away the time at his business in Boston till the year of probation should be over, and he could come across to England and claim his bride.

As Bettina sat now on the rocks, feeling tired and bored, she half wished she had yielded to his entreaties and become his wife in Paris the year before. She would certainly have enjoyed herself that summer at Saratoga far more than she was enjoying herself at Seacombe.

At length the sound of Theo's voice calling her fell on her ear.

"Bettina! Bettina!" she cried, in troubled accents.

"What is it?" responded Bettina, in her clear, shrill voice, but without rising.



"Bettina! Help! help!" returned the girl, in terrified tones.

And at last, fairly roused, Bettina started from her seat, and began hurriedly making her way through the bushes toward the point from which her sister's cry had proceeded.

Hardly, however, had she passed through the belt of brushwood which surrounded the base of the cliff, than she heard a strong, rapid footstep approaching her. A man's powerful arm pushed the brambles and branches aside, and on emerging from the wood, she saw Rupert, who had reached the foot of the cliff, and Theo, some twenty feet above him, on a narrow ledge, holding on to the grass and brushwood for dear life, a newly-fallen heap of chalk and pebbles below showing how her footing on the frail chalk had given way beneath her.

"Hold on! I am coming!" cried a cheery voice, in answer to her despairing cry. "Hold on! I will be beside you in a moment."

But it was too late. The frail weeds and grass to which she had been clinging gave way. The treacherous chalk crumbled beneath her weight, and Theo fell, with a sharp cry: but only to be caught, bruised, in truth, and terribly frightened, in the arms of Rupert Falconer.

"You are not much hurt, I trust?" he said, anxiously, as he laid her gently on the soft grass.

"No, no! thanks to you," she replied, blushing deeply, and putting aside the masses of long, dark hair, which her fall had loosened from the comb that confined them, and which fell in a glorious confusion over her shoulders, and far below her waist. "Oh, how foolish I have been, and what a trouble to you both!" And she looked at Bettina, who was standing by, sobbing hysterically. "My sister," she explained.

"Oh, Theo, how you have frightened me!" wept Bettina. "If it had not been for this gentleman, you would have been killed before my eyes. I could not have saved you; I am far too feeble. When will you give up your childish ways, dear? You are getting too old to climb about like a school-girl. Dear me! I feel quite overcome."

"Indeed, Bettina, I am so sorry!" replied Theo. "I fear I have given you a great fright, and put this gentleman to a great deal of trouble."

"None at all, I assure you," replied Rupert, with evident sincerity. "But let me warn you not to trust yourself to these cliffs. They are dangerous climbing. I hope you are really not the worse for your fall?"

"No, indeed," replied Theo, twisting up her massive tresses again, and putting on her straw hat. "Come, Bettina, let us be going. I thank you, sir, for saving me—a thousand

times!" And she held out her hand, shyly, to Rupert, with a sweet smile.

But Bettina continued to sob.

"It is all very well for you, Theo, to say, 'Let us go.' You have no nerves, child. I have; and am so shaken! You have no idea how terrified I was when I saw her fall, sir. How thankful I am to you for having saved her—my only sister! But I really feel as if I had not strength enough left to get home." And she tried to rise, and then fell back, helplessly, against the grassy bank.

"Allow me to offer you my arm," cried Rupert, eagerly. "I can well understand your feelings. Your sister might have had a very dangerous tumble. Let me help you to rise."

And with a smile and a blush, Bettina took Rupert's arm, and soon her fright and nerves were forgotten, and she glided, with her usual composed, graceful walk, along the now moon-lit sand, at Rupert's side, chatting merrily; while Theo walked thoughtfully along beside her, scarcely speaking, except when spoken to.

"You will come to see us, will you not?" said Bettina, as Rupert left them at the door of their lodgings. "Theo will be better able to thank you to-morrow, when she is calmer and more rested."

"I shall only be too delighted," replied Rupert, as he bowed low, and thought, as his eye rested on Theo's quiet face, that the heroine of the little adventure was far the most composed and collected of the two sisters.

"What a lovely face she has!" he thought. "The elder sister is undeniably handsome—a fine, aristocratic woman; but Theo"—for so he already called her in his thoughts—"far surpasses her in beauty, to my way of thinking;" and it was of her, and her dark, lustrous eyes he dreamed that night, not of the faultless features of the handsome Bettina.

## CHAPTER V.

### TWO SISTERS.

NEXT morning, as in duty bound, Rupert hastened to pay his respects at No. 7 Montpelier Terrace, as the fair Bettina had invited him, and was somewhat chagrined when told, in answer to his inquiries, that Mrs. Singer was sorry to say Miss Bettina was laid up with a bad cold, and Miss Theo engaged, and unable to receive visitors. So he left two cards, one for Mrs. Singer, and one for the young ladies, and went away, not a little disappointed.

And, as far as concerned Bettina, the excuse for not receiving him was a true one enough. Poor Bettina was a prisoner in her room, the victim of a violent cold in the head, which made her eyes dull and heavy, and her pretty nose and fair cheeks swollen and red; and Bettina would rather have died than present her-



self before the handsome stranger in such a plight.

She felt sure that he would call that morning, and bewailed her sad fate plaintively in being unable to receive him, and took care to send Theo out before the visiting hour arrived, so that if she were not able to improve her acquaintance with the expected visitor, Theo should certainly not steal a march on her.

"For all she is so quiet and demure," thought Bettina, "Theo has a way with her that fascinates men, though often enough the stupid little thing does not see it. I don't want this man to fall a victim to her big black eyes, like poor Captain Clarke did last winter, who was well-nigh mad about her; and then, when things came to a crisis, and he proposed, the child vowed that she had never suspected that he loved her, and cried like a baby over the whole affair. No; it's better for both parties that they shouldn't meet alone. Theo has no heart. She is still a perfect child. It would be a shame!"

And so the over-considerate Bettina sent Theo out for a long ramble, and arranged herself for the afternoon comfortably on the sofa, wrapped up in a becoming dressing-gown, with a pile of books beside her, and various boxes of tasty lozenges within easy reach of her hand, and resigned herself to her fate.

He would call again, she felt sure. They were certain to meet again somehow; yet, the more she thought of it, the more vexed she became that she should have taken cold just at the present crisis.

Rupert, after leaving the terrace, walked slowly along the beach toward a rugged headland that jutted out into the sea. As he neared it, the sounds of a sweet, clear voice, singing, fell on his ear.

And he stopped for a moment to listen. Could it be Theo? The voice reminded him of hers; and, as it died away in the distance, he started off to follow, and, if possible, to catch a glimpse of the singer.

Rounding a mass of dark rocks, clothed thickly with sea-weeds and limpets, he suddenly saw before him the object of his search, bending over a deep pool of water, a basket of shells and seaweed on her arm, and a dredging-net in her hand, with which she was endeavoring to lift some lovely specimens of the sea anemone from the bottom of the pool. It was Theo.

"Allow me to help you," said Rupert, coming up just as she had made an unsuccessful attempt to capture her treasure. "I can reach them easily for you."

Theo started at the sound of his voice, and colored.

"Thank you," she replied. "See what beauties they are!"

And she pointed to some gigantic specimens

of her favorite sea-flowers, which were spreading out their crimson and yellow branches in the clear, green water of the pool.

"Beautiful, indeed!" replied Rupert, taking the net from her hand; and, in a moment, securing the prizes. "I have just been calling at your lodgings," he added.

"Have you, indeed?" she replied, eagerly.

"Yes," he returned; "they told me you were engaged, and your sister too unwell to see visitors. Let me hope the one is as great a mistake as the other has proved."

"No; Bettina is really ill with a cold. She is so subject to colds," replied Theo; "but I have been rambling about here ever since lunch was over. What made them say I was engaged, I wonder?"

And she looked puzzled for a moment.

"Ah! I dare say they thought I was in Bettina's room, reading to her; and, indeed, I did read to her for ever so long this morning; but she insisted on my going out this afternoon, or I should have been at home to receive you. I was sorry to go out; but went as Bettina bade me. I thought you might very likely call, and—and I should have been sorry to have missed you."

And she blushed again.

"Would you have been sorry, really?" asked Rupert, eagerly. Then, seeing her rising color, he added, "Well, I am glad—only too delighted, as it has turned out, that your sister did recommend you to take a walk, and that fortune guided my footsteps in this direction; and that, in spite of all mistakes, we have met. I hope your sister is not really ill, though?"

"Oh, no," returned Theo; "only she has a cold. She has been subject to them ever since we came to England two years ago."

"Then you have not always lived in England?" asked Rupert, in surprise.

"We? Oh, dear, no! We are Americans. That is, we were born and brought up in America, though papa's papa was an Englishman, and we live in England now. Dear me! didn't you discover we were Yankees? English people generally do, much to Bettina's disgust."

And Theo laughed merrily.

"American! How strange!" cried Rupert. "Why, I only left America a few weeks ago."

"Indeed! But you are English, surely? You are not an American?"

And she looked him full in the face, with a frank smile.

"True. I have only been for a time in America," he replied.

And then their conversation fell on the land they had lately quitted, and Rupert grew more and more fascinated by his lovely little companion every moment he passed in her society; and, ere the sun began to set, he felt that his heart was irrevocably lost, and woke to a bitter



sense of the folly he was committing in falling in love at all, more especially with a girl of whom he knew nothing whatever, except that she was beautiful and lovable in the extreme.

"How grave you look, all of a sudden!" cried Theo, starting up from the rock on which she was sitting. "What is the matter? Dear me" (drawing out a tiny watch), "how late it is! I must be going. Oh, dear, what a long time I have been detaining you here, collecting all this rubbish for me! What will Bettina say to me for being so late? Why, it is just dinner-time!"

"Dinner-time! You don't say so?" cried Rupert.

"Yes, indeed; it is seven o'clock. How quickly the time has passed!"

And, for a few moments, they walked along in silence.

"Do you stay long at Seacombe?" inquired Rupert, at last.

"Yes; for six weeks more, I hope," replied Theo; "and you?"

"My time is at my own disposal just now," he answered. "I think I shall be here awhile longer."

"Oh, then, perhaps we may some day be able to go to the rocks in Sandway Cove you were talking of," she returned, eagerly.

"Certainly; any day you like," he replied. "When shall I see you again, Miss—Miss Theo?"

And he looked at her anxiously.

"In a day or two. To-morrow, perhaps; if Bettina is not well, I shall be down on the beach after lunch, most likely," she replied, simply. "I am so much obliged to you for helping me. Good-by!"

And she held out her little hand to him.

He took it and pressed it in his.

"Good-night, then!" he said. "I shall be on the beach to-morrow before you are, I fancy, and only too delighted to help you again, if you will let me."

And he turned away, with a feeling half of sadness, half of joy in his heart.

Ah, if Hale Castle were only his! But, now, what business had he to think of love or marriage?

"Theo, where *have* you been all these hours?" cried Bettina, in a fretful voice, as Theo entered the room. "Good gracious, look at your new dress, child—a foot deep in sand and mud, I declare! Now, for goodness sake, don't bring any of your hideous sea-monsters to show me, Theo! You know I can't endure them. I declare, when you once get out onto those sands, you forget every one but yourself!"

"Dear Bettina, I'm so sorry! What has put you out so?"

"Oh, never mind!" Then, after a pause,

"I have had a letter from Gustave, by-the-by."

"Oh, indeed; and when will he be over?" asked Theo, joyfully.

"When? Really, Theo, you are so enthusiastic about Gustave, and so anxious to know all about his comings and goings, one would imagine he was your lover instead of mine. There! don't be cross. I didn't mean it, really. You should not give way to your temper like that, Theo." (As poor Theo began an indignant disclaimer.) "Well, if you care to know, Gustave sails on the 4th; so will be here in three weeks. Heigho!"

"In three weeks? Ar'n't you glad, Bettina?" asked Theo. "You don't seem a bit pleased."

"Well, child, to tell you the truth, I'm not particularly overjoyed. I didn't want Gustave to arrive till we returned home. He's all very well when there are other people about to give one a variety; but he is a little fatiguing, and to have him here all alone will be too much. Besides" (with a simper), "I had intended to cultivate our new friend a little. He called while you were out."

Theo felt the blood rush to her cheeks, and turned aside to hide it. Somehow, she couldn't bring herself to tell Bettina that she had met him.

"At what time did he come?" she asked.

"Oh, just after you went out, child. Aunt sent down word that I was ill, and that you were not at home—or I did; I forget which. It was a horrid bore I couldn't see him; but I dare say he'll call again soon. Now go and get ready for dinner, Theo, and afterward you can come and read to me again, if you like. My eyes feel so weak and heavy. I wonder why I always look such a fright when I have a cold? You don't. I think it's very unfair and hard on me. Give me that hand-glass before you go."

And Theo did so; and, leaving Bettina to examine the ravages that her cold had made on her beauty, escaped from the room.

"I wonder that Bettina is not more glad that Gustave is coming," she thought, as she fastened a blue ribbon round her throat. "If I were engaged now, I should think of nothing else, and no one else if my lover were coming across the sea to me. Well, perhaps I never shall have a lover; but Bettina seems to have heaps. I don't believe she really cares for poor Gustave, though; and, if not, why has she promised to marry him, I wonder? I *like* him well enough; but I couldn't marry him for all the world, poor fellow, good-tempered as he is. Well, I'm only a child, I suppose, as Bettina says; and I dare say it's all right, and that Gustave suits her, and she'll be very happy with him when they are married; but, if she loves him, why, how can she care to flirt with every one she meets?"



And this idea of Bettina's "improving her acquaintance" with her new friend was anything but agreeable to Theo; and a suspicion entered her mind—a vague, uneasy feeling that her sister had purposely sent her out of the way that afternoon, because she had expected him to call, and felt glad that she had not mentioned their meeting at the headland.

Bettina's cold was no better the next day, nor the next, nor for several days after.

Each afternoon Rupert called; and each afternoon, by some strange coincidence, he met Theo either on the beach, or on the downs, or in some shady lane, and each day he felt he loved her more and more, that his heart was devoted to her; and that, come what might, he would some day win her for his wife.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TRUST HER NOT.

It was not many days, however, before Bettina was sufficiently recovered from her indisposition to leave her room, and to receive visitors; and when Rupert called as usual to make his inquiries, to his surprise he was asked to enter, and soon found himself in a large, luxuriously-furnished drawing-room, and saw before him the tall form of the beautiful Bettina, reclining on a sofa, and arrayed in the most tasteful of negligent costumes.

"At last! How glad I am to see you, Mr. Halsham!" she cried, rising, and advancing to meet him. "I have been quite laid up. The fright of seeing Theo fall the other evening was quite too much for me. I was terribly shaken by it."

And she raised a bottle of salts to her nose, as if she feared that the remembrance of the scene might bring on another attack of nerves.

"Your illness does not seem to have changed you much," replied Rupert, with a smile he endeavored not to allow to become ironical. "You look a little pale, but otherwise I should never have fancied you an invalid. How is your sister this morning?"

"Oh, little Theo? Quite well; and out on the rocks, as usual. I quite grudge having been shut up all this lovely weather; I should so enjoy being out! I was going to try a turn in the garden, Mr. Halsham. Is it warm out? If so, I will walk round, if you will accompany me. I hardly like to venture alone, I feel so weak."

"With pleasure!" replied Rupert, who was casting longing glances already toward the door, and thinking how Theo would be waiting for him, and wondering what had become of him, down by the headland.

And then Bettina enveloped herself in a graceful wrap, which couldn't be adjusted without his help, consulted him as to the safety of walking in the garden in her delicately

embroidered kid slippers, and finally, leaning on his arm, led him through the conservatory into the bright little grounds beyond, and slowly made the tour of them, stopping at each favorite bush or flower, and chatting merrily all the while.

"Dear me! I have quite tired you out, I believe!" she said, at length, with a fascinating glance at the young man. "Let us go in; and, if you have no engagement, will you stay and take a cup of tea? Aunt is out; but perhaps you would not mind putting up with me for company?"

"Indeed, I should only be too proud!" replied Rupert, who, by this time, was growing desperate, and wished Bettina, pretty as she was, together with all her airs and graces, at the North Pole; "but I am engaged this evening. Indeed, in the pleasure of your society, I have quite forgotten how time has been going, and fear I shall be late."

Bettina's face fell.

"An engagement? How provoking! Well, you will come another day, will you not?" she said.

"Can you doubt it, if I have your permission?" he answered.

And he shook hands warmly; and in a minute more was hurrying off toward the beach.

Bettina watched him from the window.

"Who does he know here, I wonder? I must find out. Ah! there is Theo! I wonder if he will see her?"

And she strained her eyes till a turn in the cliff hid him from her sight, hoping to ascertain if he had spoken to Theo as he passed her.

Then Bettina rung for her tea, drank a cup, rolled herself up in her wraps, and dropped off comfortably to sleep on the soft cushions of her pet sofa, her favorite method of getting through an afternoon when there was nothing particular to amuse her.

Meanwhile, Theo had waited patiently by the headland for Rupert till, hour after hour passing without his making his appearance, she gave him up for that day, and prepared to return home, more disappointed than she even liked to own to herself.

Before she had walked very far, however, she saw him coming rapidly toward her, and again turned in the direction of their favorite rocks.

"Here you are at last!" she cried, turning toward him with a bright smile. "I thought you were never coming."

"You did miss me, then?" he said. "Well, I thought I should never get to you. I called at your home, and—"

"And Bettina made you stay. Isn't that what you are going to tell me?" And she laughed merrily. "Poor Bettina! I'm afraid she has been having a dull time of it lately; and I fear it has hardly been kind of me to



leave her so much. How did you think her looking, Mr. Halsham?"

"Miss Singer was looking very well, I thought," began Rupert.

"Miss Singer!—Bettina!" interrupted Theo.

"Well, Bettina, then. She looked very well indeed," said Rupert.

"She is very lovely; don't you think so?" asked Theo. "She is like our mother, I believe; I am like papa."

"Yes; Miss Bettina is beautiful. But I never admire fair beauties so much as dark ones. Your mother is dead, then? I thought Mrs. Singer—"

"Mrs. Singer! There is no Mrs. Singer! Miss Singer is my aunt," replied Theo.

"Oh, indeed!" said Rupert, looking puzzled.

"Yes; mamma died when I was quite a little child. I remember it well. My brother Ellwood was at home then."

"Oh, you have a brother, then?" said Rupert. "In England?"

"No; he is in America," she replied, in a sad voice, and changed the subject. "See, Mr. Halsham," she said; "do you admire my work?" And she drew out of her portfolio a sketch she had been making that morning. "This is for papa. He always likes to see sketches of the places we go to. See! here is one I did of the scene of my tumble."

"Capital, Miss Theo! You are quite an artist!" replied Rupert, with genuine admiration.

"Ah!" she replied; "you should see Gustave's drawings! He taught me."

"Gustave! And who may he be?" asked Rupert, with a cold feeling at his heart.

"Gustave? Why, Gustave Van Bolt—my sister's intended. He is to be here in a fortnight." Then, recollecting herself, she added, "But perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it; Bettina might not like it. Don't say I told you, please, unless you're asked."

"Certainly not," replied Rupert, much relieved to find Gustave was Bettina's intended. "And do you like your future brother-in-law?"

"Yes; he is a kind, good fellow!" replied Theo. "But yet—" and she paused. "But of course, if Bettina is satisfied with him, it's all right. He is very rich indeed; and so generous, he loads Bettina with presents, and would load me with them, too, only I don't like to take them. See! he gave me this watch." And she drew out a tiny, fragile toy, with a monogram in turquoises on the back. "He adores Bettina, too. I never saw such a devoted lover."

"Then, when he comes, he will quite take possession of your sister, I suppose," said Rupert, "and you will have no further excuse for shutting yourself up in the house every

morning? Your time will be quite at your own disposal?"

"Yes; but for that matter I do not think I am much of a prisoner. Why, I am out every day from three till seven," she laughed; "and last night we did not get home till nearly eight. I wonder you were not tired of my company."

"I should never be that!" he replied, in a low, earnest voice. "The hours I have spent with you here I shall always reckon among the happiest of my life."

Theo blushed, and for awhile they sat together in happy silence. Then the clock struck seven, and they parted.

And, alas! this was to be the last meeting they were to enjoy together for several days to come.

Bettina, on Theo's return to the Terrace, asked her point-blank had she not met Mr. Halsham, and the girl was far too honest and truthful to deny that she had; and then Bettina put on her protecting air (an air Theo had begun to resent, for she felt that in reality she was no longer a child, and that Bettina, being but a few years her senior, was not entitled to lecture her), and held forth to her sister on the impropriety of wandering about Seacombe alone with a stranger.

"When I am with you, of course it is different," she concluded; "but when you are alone, you should not be so thoughtless."

And ever afterward Bettina regularly accompanied Theo on her afternoon rambles, tiring herself terribly, wetting her pretty boots, and affecting an interest in marine products she was far from feeling, only because she fancied Rupert took an interest in them, and for the pleasure of enjoying his society, a pleasure that increased rapidly by indulgence, and which made the advent of Gustave Van Bolt more distasteful to her than ever.

Was her passion for coquetry to be punished at last?—was she about to be caught in her own toils?—was she really beginning to care in earnest for Rupert Halsham?

The idea forced itself on her one morning, and fairly frightened her, and a bitter pang of jealousy struck through her heart as she saw his pleased look when Theo, all unconscious of the state of her sister's feelings, suddenly appeared before them on the beach, when Bettina had thought she was safely seated by aunt Singer's side at home; and this new insight into her feelings made Bettina regard the coming of Van Bolt with absolute terror.

"Why did I ever promise to marry him?" she thought.

And the answer, spite of herself, came quickly. He was rich—very rich. His house in Boston was a miracle of luxury.

Bettina loved money, and adored luxury,



and had always professed it her belief that love could be dispensed with in matrimony.

"I admire the French style," she had been wont to say; "it saves a girl so much present trouble and future disappointment!"

And, behold! she had awakened to the knowledge that her heart—what there was of it—was given, and given unasked, to a stranger, and perhaps to a poor man. Would it not be better to see him no more?

But Bettina was weak, and but little accustomed to control her inclinations. For a day or two, indeed, she made faint, futile efforts to withdraw herself from Rupert's society; but the very indifference with which he submitted to her altered conduct galled her.

She tried in vain to keep away from him, and soon she was more in his society than ever, and felt that to exist without seeing him would be impossible.

"Oh! if he would only tell me that he loves me," she thought, "I would give up all" ("all" being Van Bolt and his riches) "for him! And he must love me!—he must see that I love him!—and knows nothing about Gustave. Why does he not speak, I wonder? No one ever treated me so cruelly before!"

And, piqued and annoyed at Rupert's coldness, she strove her utmost to fascinate him, and was more winning and gracious in her manner than ever; paid him a thousand little compliments, delicately veiled, which would have flattered many men into a declaration; gave him a hundred little opportunities of being alone in her company which many men might have been tempted to turn to account, but in vain; and it was with a heavy heart that Bettina found there wanted but three more days to the arrival from America of Gustave Van Bolt, her betrothed.

She looked worn and worried, was irritable and capricious—more, even, than was ordinary with her—till even Miss Singer, the most obtuse of unobserving mortals, could not but observe that "really the expectation of meeting Gustave had excited and upset Bettina more than she had ever imagined it possible anything could do." She "felt quite anxious about the dear child," she declared; and "was overjoyed to find how deep was her affection for Gustave. She had been half afraid Bettina did not feel the amount of interest in her lover a young girl on the point of marriage should do; but she had wronged her, and was delighted to find she had been mistaken.

But Theo saw the change in her sister with great astonishment, and puzzled her head over it for many an hour without being able to find the solution of the riddle.

Had she offended Bettina? she wondered. Sometimes her sister looked at her as if she positively hated her; and at other times cut her to the heart with hard, sarcastic speeches;

yet, before Rupert, always treated her with overwhelming tenderness and affection.

What did it all mean? Theo could not, for the life of her, divine.

But Bettina's hard speeches and cutting remarks to her sister had not escaped Rupert's keen observation.

Was the pretty, frivolous creature a tyrant in private? he wondered; and was his little Theo's home-life not so happy as he had fancied it? Was her sister a hard task-mistress to her?

Coming suddenly one day on the poor child as she was walking, sadly and slowly, along a shady lane, just as the trailing skirts of Bettina's robe disappeared behind the turning toward home, he found her in tears.

"What is it, Theo?" he cried, forgetting in his surprise that he addressed her by her Christian name. "Crying? What for?"

"Oh, nothing," she replied, wiping her eyes.

"Only Bettina is vexed with me about something; but it is very foolish of me to cry, only I can't bear any one I love to be cross to me."

And the tears rose again in the soft, dark eyes.

"Who, who that knew you, could be cross to you, I wonder?" he said, softly—"to you, who are so good, and sweet, and gentle?"

"You are very kind to say so," replied she, blushing; "but I'm afraid I'm very foolish sometimes, and that vexes Bettina, and then she says hard, cruel things to me, and I think more of them than I ought, I dare say, and—"

"Yes. Forgive me, but I have noticed that your sister has a sharp tongue; and—and I have noticed how sad you have looked at times lately. I have longed to ask you why; but I never see you alone now," he said.

"No. Those mornings when we rambled together, how delightful they were, out by the headland there!" she answered, simply; and then blushed crimson and hurried on. "We must try and join Bettina," she said, "or she will be so angry."

"Nay; if our mornings together were really delightful, Theo, let us pass one more together—let us go down to the beach now. See, it is quite early!" And he laid his hand imploringly on her arm. "We may not have another opportunity for a long time," he added.

And, after a moment's hesitation, Theo allowed him to lead her down toward the headland; and in a few moments more they were seated side by side on their favorite rock, the blue sky smiling above them, and the little waves rippling merrily at their feet.

"Theo, Theo!" whispered the young man, passionately; "this is happiness, indeed, to be with you once more!" And he took the little, unresisting hand that lay beside him in his. "Theo, I love you, darling! Tell me you love me!—say you will be my wife!"



And he pressed his lips over and over again on the little white hand he held in his.

She answered him by one shy, happy glance; and in a moment more her lover's arms were round her, and her head had sunk on his shoulder, and their lips had met.

At that blissful moment, hasty steps were heard approaching, and Theo's name was called in a commanding voice.

"Bettina!" cried Theo, springing up with a frightened look. "I must leave you!—I must go! She will be so angry if she finds me here with you!"

And, like a frightened bird, she fled from the spot, leaving Rupert alone by the sea.

How all the brightness seemed to die out of the sky, and the music out of the waves, when she had departed! But yet Rupert was supremely happy, for had she not confessed that she loved him, and what more could he desire?

Poor Theo fared badly when she overtook her irate sister, and felt that her chances of meeting Rupert again for some days to come were very small. And Bettina kept her employed at home every morning, and sent her to pay visits with Miss Singer in the afternoon regularly; and each time that Rupert called at the Terrace, Bettina only was there to receive him, and in vain he looked and waited for Theo at the headland and their favorite haunts. She came not; and it was only at a distance, and in company with her aunt, that he as much as caught a glimpse of her sweet face for many a weary day.

## CHAPTER VII.

GUSTAVE VAN BOLT.

ONE morning—a whole four-and-twenty hours before Bettina expected it—a carriage drove up to the door, laden high with luggage, out of which stepped a stranger.

Bettina, who was pacing up and down the drawing-room in a state of great agitation—for she had been expecting Rupert, and he had not come, and she felt that if he did not speak that afternoon—if that very day she did not wring an avowal from him, all would be lost—rushed to the window, and, to her dismay, saw Gustave Van Bolt descending from the vehicle.

"Oh, Heavens!" she muttered, throwing up her hands. "All is over!—he is here! Oh, Rupert, Rupert!"

And, instead of hastening to meet her betrothed, she hurried from the drawing-room, and locked herself into her own apartment.

Meanwhile, Van Bolt entered the house, and his voice was soon heard in loud tones greeting Theo, and asking anxiously how and where Bettina was.

"Not ill, I hope?" he said, glancing toward the drawing-room.

"Oh, no," replied Theo; she has had a cold,

but is all right again now. How delighted she will be to see you! Come up-stairs; she was there a moment ago. Stay" (as she found the room empty); "I'll go and fetch her."

And, ushering Gustave into the drawing-room, she left him and went in search of her sister.

Gustave Van Bolt was a short, stout, light-haired man, plain in face and rotund in figure; his flaxen hair curled in short, crisp curls all over his head, and his somewhat thick lips were concealed by a long, fair mustache; while his little blue eyes twinkled nervously as he stood waiting for Bettina to appear, and ever and anon his large fat hands felt anxiously in his pockets for something.

Bettina came not, and he grew more and more nervous, and, as if to comfort himself, pulled out the secret something from his pocket, and looked with an air of exulting delight into a large morocco jewel-case, containing a set of exquisite diamonds.

"They will suit her!" he muttered; "she'll be pleased with them."

And, with a sigh of relief and content, he slipped them into his ample pocket again, and just in time, for the door opened, and Theo, with a rather puzzled face entered, followed by Bettina.

"Bettina!" cried Gustave, advancing toward her with outstretched arms; and the look of joy that overspread his ordinary face suddenly transformed, and made it, for the moment, almost handsome.

"Bettina, my love, this is happiness indeed!"

And, in a moment more, he had taken her in his arms, and kissed her affectionately, and, it must be added, loudly.

Bettina murmured something unintelligible in reply, and disengaged herself abruptly from his clasp.

"You forget, Gustave," she said, reprovingly, and with a glance at her sister, "we are not alone."

"Why, 'Tina, Theo will forgive me, I know," he began, apologetically, "when a fellow hasn't seen you for six months."

"I don't see why 'a fellow,' as you call yourself, should forget his manners because he hasn't seen me for six months," replied Bettina, shortly. "But never mind; it's your old way. Go, sit down, do" (he was fidgeting and shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, in an awkward and embarrassed manner), "and tell us your news."

And she pointed to a chair, and sunk gracefully back on the sofa.

Gustave looked at her with intense admiration.

"You are prettier than ever, 'Tina, I declare," he said at last, and began diving in his pockets again. "See, here's something I've



brought you—something pretty; but they're not half good enough for you, though!"

And he tossed the jewel-case into her lap.

Bettina gave a little cry of admiration, as she opened the case, and her eyes rested on the sparkling gems.

"Where did you get them?—they are lovely," she cried.

And, in her joy, she allowed him to embrace her again without offering any resistance.

"Blondetfels—where else?" he replied, with a satisfied laugh.

"I thought so," cried Bettina in an ecstasy; "there's no one like them. The stones are finer than Lady Hallowfield's, Theo."

And she clasped the necklace round her throat, and, for the moment, Rupert was forgotten.

Theo, with a still more puzzled look, left the room, and the lovers were alone together. She had found Bettina in a state of despair, which, according to her own account at the time, was too overpowering to admit of her meeting Gustave that evening. By dint of coaxing and entreaties, Bettina had been induced to come forth and welcome him, though vowing that she had no heart to go through such a mockery; that she would not, could not meet him as her lover; and behold! a few diamonds, a few glittering baubles, had altered the whole state of her feelings, calmed her despair, dried her tears, and enabled her to receive Gustave with tolerable equanimity and warmth.

What a strange mood Bettina had been in these few days past! What was the meaning of it? But, at any rate, if diamonds could soothe it so easily, it could not be of serious consequence. At least, so thought Theo.

"Now, Bettina," cried Van Bolt, a few hours afterward, as he found himself again alone in the drawing-room with his bride elect, Theo having stolen away to her garden, and left Miss Singer indulging in an afternoon nap in the library,—“now, Bettina, I want to have some serious conversation with you.”

"Indeed," she sighed, and divined at once what was coming; "don't, Gustave; I don't feel in the humor to be serious just now."

"Yes, but positively I must, my dear," he said, taking one of her slim white hands in his brown paw. "I've come across on purpose to settle this matter; and I've seen your father" (Bettina started); "and as far as he goes, and money matters go, it's all right, and he's willing for us to be married right away—I mean in a month or six weeks' time, and—"

"But my trousseau?" gasped Bettina, turning pale.

"Trousseau be hanged!" he cried. "Why, in a week's time in London I'd engage to fit out twenty young ladies; besides, we'll go to Paris for our honeymoon, if you like, and there

you can go shopping to your heart's content. So name the day, my love?"

"I can't—I can't!" she cried.

"Nonsense, Bettina! What's the use of saying you can't—you'll have to do it some day, and why not now?" replied Van Bolt, philosophically. "We've known each other for a year, and been engaged for eight months; it's time we were married, my dear; and if you don't want it put off for a year, or if you want to be married in town—"

"Certainly," interrupted Bettina—"at St. George's. I've set my heart on that."

"Then you must marry me at once, my love, for I can't come again for a year at least. Business is business, Bettina, you know, and must be attended to. I can't leave Boston again for a twelvemonth, or more, perhaps; so when shall it be, Bettina?"

Bettina trembled and hesitated.

"I'll consult aunt and Theo," she said, "and let you know."

"All right," replied Van Bolt, calmly. "Any day in the next six weeks will suit me; but the sooner, the better pleased I shall be; for" (and an expression that softened all his rugged features passed over his face) "I love you, Bettina, and without you can't be happy."

And he bent over and kissed her tenderly.

Bettina shuddered.

"I'll settle it with Theo," she said.

And rose to leave the room.

"But you've not heard all I had to tell you, Tina," he said, detaining her. "Your father has a jolly plan in his head; he wants us all—he, ourselves, Theo, and his manager—to go over home together. By the way, he's down here—the manager, I mean—somewhere. Not a bad-looking fellow. What do you say to that, ma'am, eh?"

And he looked at her as if he expected her to be overjoyed at the idea.

But, instead, she looked troubled and uneasy.

"Is this quite settled?" she asked.

"Yes; don't you like it, Bettina? I thought you and Theo were inseparable," he said.

"So we are; but—but this manager; who is he?" she asked.

"Don't you know?—a Mr. Halsham—met him once on the Savahana estate—don't think he knew who I was, though. Clever fellow, they say," replied Gustave.

"Mr. Halsham my father's manager!" cried Bettina, greatly excited. "Why, he never told us so! He's been about with us a great deal—that is, he—Theo—I—he saved Theo's life one day, and we've often seen him since. How odd he never told us he was papa's Savahana manager!"

"Queer, certainly. Well, you know it now. What sort of a fellow is he, Tina?" asked Van Bolt.



"Oh, well enough," replied she. "You'll see him to-morrow, I dare say."

And she could not restrain a peculiar smile.

Van Bolt saw it, and an uneasy expression spread itself over his face.

"Not been making love to you 'Tina, I hope?"

And he looked at her with eyes that had a tinge of ferocity in them.

"Me?—oh, dear, no!" cried Bettina; "to Theo more likely. But you know what a child she is."

"Yes, bless her—a perfect child—as innocent as a baby," said Van Bolt, heartily. "Well, as long as it's not you, Bettina, I don't mind. Queer chap, though, not to have let out who he was."

And, strange as it may seem, Rupert had no idea that the young ladies he was in the habit of seeing daily were the daughters of his cousin; he imagined their name to be Singer; he was but seldom at the house or in the society of their aunt, who would quickly have undeceived him, and it had never come about that his error regarding their surname had been set right; and when, next morning, he met the fair Bettina leaning on the arm of Van Bolt, and accompanied by Theo, he was little prepared for the revelation in store for him.

"Let me present you to Mr. Van Bolt, Mr. Halsham; you have met before, I believe, but it is some time ago."

And she looked at Gustave.

"Don't fancy you remember me; but I met you on the Savahana estate, when you were opening it for Mr. Falconer. I saw him a few days since. By the way," said Gustave, "he's coming down here."

"Indeed!" said Rupert, returning Van Bolt's shake of the hand heartily. "I shall be delighted to see him again."

And, turning to Theo, he marked with wonder her changing color, and the surprise depicted on her face.

"Why did you never tell us this before?" she cried.

"Tell you before—what, Miss Theo?" he asked.

"What! why that you are papa's manager, and a friend of his."

And she looked at him reproachfully.

He turned to her in amazement.

"But surely—" he said. "Nay, have I been making a terrible mistake all this time? Are not these young ladies the Misses Singer?"

Van Bolt broke into a roar of good-humored laughter, in which Bettina feebly joined.

"Singer!" he cried. "No, my dear, sir; what put such an idea into your head? These young ladies are the Miss Falconers, of Hale Castle and Peterstown, U. S."

Rupert fell back a step, and turned very pale.

"I must offer a thousand apologies for my stupidity!" he said.

"I don't see why," cried Theo.

"No apologies are required—your mistake was a very natural one," said Bettina, with a sweet smile.

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," quoted Van Bolt, with another hearty laugh. "Why, man, you look quite disturbed! What is it?"

What, indeed! Enough to disturb Rupert not a little. Theo—his Theo—his love—was Jonathan Falconer's daughter! Would he ever consent to a marriage between her and his ruined kinsman? Ah, never!

And, with a heavy heart, he walked along beside Bettina and her lover.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "A WOMAN SCORNEO."

"I TELL you, Theo, it's most improper of you, and I shall feel it my duty to speak to aunt if you continue to behave in this manner!" cried Bettina, in an angry voice, and scarlet with anger, as the two sisters sat together, one evening, in the garden. "Do you fancy Mr. Halsham admires you the more for being so bold?"

"Bettina, Bettina, you are very unkind to speak so to me!" cried poor Theo, tearfully. "What could I do? You and Gustave walked off together; aunt stayed behind with old Mrs. Harrington; I was obliged to walk home with Mr. Halsham."

"Nonsense, Theo; you could have walked with Gustave and me easily enough if you had thought proper," answered Bettina.

"But Gustave himself told me—" began Theo.

"Now, don't quote Gustave to me, Theo; he would never advise you to behave in a manner that would cause you to be talked about. Don't speak ill of Gustave to me, if you please!" cried Bettina, wrathfully. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Theo, making up to a man in that manner; he doesn't care for you, I tell you, one pin!"

"But, Bettina—" sobbed Theo.

"It's no use your crying and making a fool of yourself, Theo," replied Bettina, sulkily. "I hope I may never have to speak to you like this again; but you do make me really cross with you!"

"What's amiss—what's amiss?" cried a jolly voice; and Van Bolt, carrying a large basket of fruit, entered. "Here, Bettina—here are some grapes for you. What! Theo crying? What's the matter, child?" And he looked



from Bettina to Theo in great surprise. "Not quarreling, sure-ly?" said he.

"Well, I was just giving Theo a lecture, Gustave," said Bettina. "Mr. Halsham—"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Van Bolt. "Have you only just discovered the state of affairs in that quarter?"

"I don't know what you mean by the state of affairs, Gustave," cried Bettina, turning redder than ever. "I think Theo's way of behaving to Mr. Halsham should be altered. She quite persecutes the poor man with her foolish attentions!"

"Bettina," cried Theo, rising, "you must excuse me, but I must decline to listen when you speak to me like that." And, holding her little head very high, she left the room, to Bettina's intense astonishment—for the girl had never rebelled against her before—and to Van Bolt's mingled amusement and admiration.

"Halsham isn't persecuted by her attentions, Bettina, you may be sure," said he, significantly: "though, as to that, I never saw Theo make up to him. Why, Bettina—surely you are not blind—can't you see that the man adores her?"

"Adores her?—rubbish!" retorted Bettina, angrily.

"Why, you told me yourself, Bettina, that he was making love to her when I first came," said Gustave, with a curious look.

"That's no reason she should flirt so outrageously," answered Bettina, sulkily.

"I don't see that she flirts, poor child! Come, Bettina; don't act the dog in the manger. You don't want him. Why grudge Theo an admirer when you've got me, my dear?" And he sat down beside her, with a laugh.

"I don't know what you consider flirting," cried Bettina, scornfully. "I tell you I have found out that, all the time I was ill, Theo used to meet Mr. Halsham almost every day on the beach, and sit with him there for hours."

"Well, my dear," replied Gustave, "that is just what you and I used to do at Trouville. Don't you remember? Dear me! I can recollect giving Miss Singer—poor, dear old lady!—the slip many a time. Why, have you forgotten, Bettina, our nearly being caught by the tide?"

"Stuff!" cried Bettina, angrily. "That was quite different. I was older; Theo is such a child, and he cannot think of marrying her."

"If Theo is 'such a child,' it can't much matter her going about with Halsham, my dear. But I think you are a little mistaken this time. Theo is eighteen (by the way, I've brought a present for her birthday—some rubies, which will just suit her), and I don't see why Halsham couldn't marry her. He has a fine property adjoining Savahana, when it's cleared up; and

if ever I saw a man in love, it's Halsham!" replied Gustave, calmly.

"In love!" replied Bettina, considerably agitated. "In love he may be, but not with Theo, I tell you."

"With whom, then, pray?" asked Gustave, a trifle sternly.

Bettina hesitated a moment.

"Well, he did once tell me; but I mustn't repeat it—" she began.

"To me you may certainly repeat it," answered Gustave decidedly.

"Well, then, he said—he hinted to me one day that his affections were already engaged," she answered, sulkily.

"Yes; to Theo," he replied.

"Not to Theo at all," she answered. "To some one—a cousin, I think—in Dorsetshire."

"Hum! Curious he has never gone to see her, then, especially as we are in Dorsetshire now! No, no, 'Tina; be sure it's to no cousin, but to some one who *is* in Dorsetshire, and not twenty miles off, neither!" replied Gustave, with a jolly laugh.

"Not twenty miles off? What do you mean?" she asked—"to whom are you alluding?"

"To Theo, to be sure!" he laughed. "*She* is not twenty miles off, and she's in Dorsetshire. Depend on it, she is the mysterious some one his affections are engaged to! Why, 'Tina, I thought you were a deal sharper than you are!"

But Bettina's temper was up, and she made a rather uncourteous reply to Gustave's speech, which he resented a trifle warmly, and a pretty quarrel—not the first by many a one—ensued between the two lovers; and at last Van Bolt, weary of the wordy warfare, left the room; and Bettina, throwing herself on the sofa, burst into a passion of angry, jealous tears.

She was aroused by a footstep, and looking up, with tear-filled eyes, beheld Rupert beside her.

"Miss Bettina," he cried, "excuse me—I am intruding, I fear; but—but what is wrong? What is the matter? Where is Mr. Van Bolt? Can I be of any assistance to you?"

Bettina dried her eyes quickly, and, with the smile of a suffering martyr, motioned Rupert to a seat, and begged him to stay with her.

"I am nervous, Mr. Halsham, and—and—oh, so very, very miserable!" And the tears flowed afresh.

Rupert felt embarrassed, and yet full of pity for Bettina's unknown woe.

"I wish I could help you. But you have Gustave if you are in any trouble; confide in him, Miss Bettina," he said.

"I confide my trouble to Gustave!" she



sobbed. "Oh, Mr. Halsbam, he is the last person, the very last person, to whom I could confess it!"

Rupert was puzzled for a moment.

"You have your sister and your father," he said, gently.

"My father—Theo?" she cried. "Never—never! I could not tell them—I cannot tell any one; but it is killing me—it is killing me!" And her sobs redoubled. "Why have I been so foolish?" she murmured, after a pause. "But it is too late now; I must go through with it; I cannot escape!"

Rupert was silent. A vague inkling of the truth, in as far as that she was alluding to her coming marriage, dawned on him.

"I should have waited and considered; but I promised too quickly, and now I see how wrong I have been. Mr. Halsbam," she continued, raising her tear-stained face, "I cannot marry Mr. Van Bolt; I do not love him!"

"Miss Falconer, consult your father," cried Rupert, anxiously, "before you do or say anything rash in this matter. Van Bolt loves you, and for his sake—"

"He loves me! Can he love?" said Bettina, bitterly. "Ah, Mr. Halsbam, you do not know him; his temper frightens me!" And she shuddered and sobbed again.

"His temper—why, I should have thought his temper perfect for a man," said Rupert, rising.

"Ah, you don't know him, Mr. Halsbam! But don't go; stay awhile with me! You don't know what comfort your society is to me—what a grateful change after the companionship of a man like Van Bolt! I can never marry him, Mr. Halsbam—never!" And she looked at him imploringly. "Advise me—help me!" she added, in the same tone.

"I—I hardly know that I ought to advise you," he continued; "your father or aunt are the persons to whom you should go—Bettina."

"My father—my aunt! They would both say, 'Marry him.' Mr. Halsbam—Rupert, they are worldly, and he is rich—very rich. But, oh! I would marry the poorest man on earth if I loved him; I care nothing for riches!" she cried. "I would give up all—everything—for love!"

And she shot a tender glance at him from beneath her long eyelashes.

"Marriage without love is certain to bring misery with it—you are right there," he replied, musingly. "Still, you know Van Bolt so well—you have been engaged to him so long, that—"

"I never loved him; I do not love him! Oh, believe me, Rupert, I never loved him!" she cried, in great agitation. "I love—I love—another!"

Rupert started.

"You love another—you do not love Van

Bolt! Then why have you not told him so long ago, and given him back his liberty? Excuse me, but you are hardly treating him fairly."

"Don't be angry; don't scold me; don't think badly of me!" cried Bettina, wringing her white hands. "I did not know my own heart, Rupert; I did not know till lately that it was given to another forever!"

There was a pause. Rupert could almost hear the beating of her heart as her bosom heaved and swelled.

"Rupert, Rupert, have pity—have mercy!" she sobbed, at last, sinking on her knees before him. "I must tell you; I know it is my only chance! Can you not see—can you not guess whom it is that I love?"

But Rupert stood before her in amazed silence.

She took his hand, and pressed it to her lips.

"It is you," she said, in an almost inaudible voice—it is you!"

Rupert started, and drew back.

"For Heaven's sake, Miss Falconer, no more—not a word more! You are over-excited; you do not know what you are saying. It will all seem so different to you to-morrow. Forget all this, for your sake as well as mine!"

And he strove to raise her from her kneeling position.

"Forget?—never!" she cried. "Oh, Rupert, I love you!"

"Hush, hush!" said Rupert, gently. "Do not speak words you will be sorry for when you are calm!"

"But do you not believe me?" she cried. "From the first day I saw you, I loved you, Rupert! Oh, say that it has not been in vain!"

Rupert was silent, and an expression of deep sorrow filled his countenance.

Bettina sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving.

"Speak!" she cried, in a voice so stern and harsh it almost startled him. "Speak—tell me the truth!"

"Miss Falconer—oh! why do you ask me? It cannot be!" he said, sorrowfully.

"Why—why?" she cried. "Can you not love me, Rupert—can you not?"

And her voice grew soft and imploring again. "Do not force me to answer," he said, gently; "it seems so ungrateful—so—"

"Good Heaven!" she cried, clasping her hands with a frantic gesture, and changing color. "Why do you torture me thus? Or is it—is it that—"

And her eyes blazed up again.

"Let us cease this!" cried Rupert. "Miss Falconer, oh, why have you acted thus? Why do you force me to tell you?" And he hesitated.

"To tell me—what?" she asked, in a strange, stifled voice.

"To tell you that I have no heart to give—"



that I love another!" he replied, quietly, though firmly.

She turned from him, with a gesture of despair.

"Oh, Heaven! he was right—Gustave was right!" she moaned, as she hid her face in the cushions of the sofa.

Rupert stood by, not knowing what to say or how to console her.

Presently she roused herself, and looked at him with cold, fierce eyes.

"You can leave me, Mr. Halsham," she said. "I have made a great mistake, and so have you. Now go."

And she pointed to the door.

"Miss Falconer—" began Rupert.

But she waved him away.

"Go, go!" she cried. "Do not torture me longer with your presence! Do not think I shall pine for you, Rupert Halsham—no! But, beware! My love has turned to hate! I will be revenged, at any rate!"

And she pointed to the door.

Without a word further, Rupert left the room. What was her love or hate to him? She was Theo's sister, and, being such, he would have done anything in his power for her for Theo's sake; but that was all. Bettina, with all her beauty and all her fascinations, was nothing to him, and could never be. Theo, to him, was the only woman in the world, and she could never be his.

Next morning Rupert met Van Bolt on the pier. The latter greeted him heartily.

"Congratulate me, Halsham," he said; "she has named the day."

"Named the day? Who? What do you mean?" asked Rupert, in amaze.

"Who? Why, Bettina, of course. We are to be married in town on the twenty-eighth of next month. You'll be at our wedding, old boy, won't you?" said Van Bolt, in high glee. "It's the ending of a long engagement, you know; and, after the honeymoon, we shall have to return to America, for I've been away long enough from business. By the way, have you heard from Falconer?"

"Yes," returned Rupert, suddenly remembering an unopened epistle from Jonathan that lay in his pocket.

"Ah! then you know all about his plan. A jolly party we shall be on board ship!"

And Van Bolt soon made Rupert understand his cousin's plan for their return to America together.

How such a plan would have delighted Rupert a few short hours ago! But, now, could he ever face Bettina again—how live in the company of "a woman scorned?"

But further surprises were in store for him. As he and Gustave stood talking together on the pier, Bettina and Theo joined them, the former in the highest spirits.

She greeted him cordially, and all remembrance of the interview of the previous day seemed to have passed from her mind. But Theo was sad, and there was a restraint in her manner toward him he could not fail to notice, and which filled him with a thousand harassing doubts and fears.

## CHAPTER IX.

### "LOVE TO HATRED TURNED."

WHEN Rupert reached his lodgings, he found a pile of letters on the table, and, one after another, he opened them listlessly, till he came to a thick, business-looking epistle which caused him to start and change color as he read it, and which he perused several times over.

The news the letter contained was unexpected and welcome enough.

Rupert had before leaving America purchased a tract of land bordering on the Savahana estate with his savings, and the letter informed him that a splendid oil-spring had been struck on his ground, and that, if properly managed, it would soon render its owner a rich man indeed.

Rupert leaned back in his chair, with a long-drawn sigh of relief.

He was poor no longer! Theo might yet be his!

The oil-spring, his correspondent informed him, if properly worked would bring in many thousands of dollars a-year; that the working was not difficult, and that the new roads he had so lately constructed through his cousin's Savahana estate would enable him to transport its product without loss or difficulty to the nearest town.

Rupert knew well the value of that of which he had so suddenly become possessed, and had little doubt that, from a worldly point of view, Jonathan Falconer would now consider him a good match for his daughter; but what was the reason of her coldness and reserve toward him? He felt as if he would willingly give him the half at least of his property to see her smile on him again in the old sweet, confiding way, and address him in the old soft, welcoming tones.

It was of this alone he thought. He cared not for wealth in itself, but only so far as it would help him to gain his heart's desire—to make Theo his wife.

But why had she been so cold and distant to him that day—so different to what she usually was?

It puzzled him; and when he remembered the strange scene of the day before with Bettina, and her thrust at parting, a pang shot through his heart.

He felt that she would do her utmost to make mischief between them, and turn Theo against him.

"I will speak to her about it at once—No; I



must speak to her father first. Seeing the peculiar position we stand in toward each other, it would be better. Let's see what he says in his letter!"

And eagerly Rupert broke the seal of the epistle that had lain so many hours unopened in his pocket.

It was a frank, hearty letter, as all Jonathan's letters were. It spoke with pleasure of Bettina's approaching marriage, and contained a cordial invitation to Rupert to be present at it, and then broached the subject of the return to America.

"Our voyage back together," he said, "would be first rate; and during the six months I intend to spend in America I shall bring Theo up to Savannah, and show her my new property, under your guidance."

Nothing could be kinder or heartier than the letter, and Rupert folded it away with great satisfaction.

"He's a good fellow, is Jonathan!" said he. "Now that my property is developing these unlooked-for treasures, I think he will not consider me too poor a man to aspire to Theo's hand!"

But when, two days later, Rupert met Jonathan Falconer on the esplanade at Seacombe, there was a strange coldness in his manner toward him that surprised and hurt the young man.

"I did not know you were expected here so soon," said he; "but I have not seen your daughter either yesterday or the day before, or I dare say I should have heard of your intentions."

"Probably," replied Jonathan. "Of course, now that Bettina's marriage is to take place so soon, they have plenty to do, and little time to devote to strangers. When do you return to America, Mr. Halsham?"

Mr. Halsham! Rupert was amazed.

"You mentioned your wish that we should all return together next month!" he replied, stiffly.

"Oh, ah—to be sure; I had forgotten! Are you in a hurry to return, sir?" replied Jonathan; "or does England contain greater attractions for you?"

"America contains the greatest attraction for me, perhaps, just now, sir!" returned Rupert, with a laugh.

"Indeed!" replied Jonathan, indifferently. "I had fancied the attraction was here!"

"No. It was about the attraction, as you call it, I particularly wished to consult you, cousin!" he began.

"Consult me, indeed!" cried Jonathan, with a look of surprise.

"Yes; undoubtedly!" returned Rupert, eagerly. "I have just heard—"

"Ah, Mr. Halsham! where have you been these last two days?" cried the shrill voice of Bettina. "I think you really might have come to pay your respects to papa! Fancy,

papa, how sly Mr. Halsham is! We saw him constantly for a month or more, and he never let out all that time that he was your manager!"

And she laughed spitefully.

"Ah, but, Bettina, you should tell your father of his absurd mistake!" cried Van Bolt, who forthwith related it; while Bettina stood beside her father, her back half turned to Rupert, humming an air; and all the while Rupert was with them she managed to shoot many a poisoned dart at the poor fellow and wound him sorely; and her words became so bitter, and her manner so scornful, as she saw his humiliation, that Jonathan cast sundry of his quick, piercing glances at her, and thought within himself that he could never have believed his pretty Bettina capable of giving any fellow such a dressing, whatever his faults might have been.

Next day Rupert met none of the Falconer family, and the day after, on calling at their lodgings to inquire for Jonathan, he was told that the whole family had gone away to London for good.

"Gone away! Did they leave no message?—no letter?" said Rupert.

"None, sir," replied the servant.

And with an angry, aching heart, Rupert turned from the door, and walked sadly away toward the headland, where he and Theo had spent so many happy days.

So she had left him without a word! Poor child! perhaps she was suffering too; and Rupert remembered well how pale and sad she had looked the last time he saw her, and how wistfully her black eyes had sought his as they exchanged their last good-night.

On his return to his lodgings, he found a letter on his table in Van Bolt's handwriting.

"We have left so suddenly" (he wrote), "in consequence of a letter I have received from Boston. Our marriage must be hastened, and will take place on the 15th, and we shall leave England on the 22d. I hope this will not hurry you; if so, we must give up the pleasure of traveling in the same ship together. Come up on the 15th, like a good fellow," etc.

And there was a postscript that interested Rupert more than all the rest of the letter:—

"What is the matter between you and Theo? Come and clear it up, and explain all this nonsense. I overheard the girls and their father talking about you."

So there was a mystery! Some one had been setting about a story to his disadvantage!

This was Bettina's revenge, doubtless!

He would take Van Bolt's advice, and set things right at once.

It was the tenth of the month—but five days before Bettina's marriage was to take place—that Rupert found himself again in London, and at Jonathan Falconer's door.

His cousin received him distantly; and, as he entered the drawing-room, he caught sight



for a moment of a pale, worn face and delicate little figure that slipped quietly out by a side-door.

After the first greetings, Jonathan sat silently, with a cold, almost stern face, as if expecting Rupert to open the conversation, and the expression of his countenance provoked Rupert not a little.

What had he done to deserve his cousin's anger?

"I have come, sir," he began, "to ask you a question—in fact, two. Firstly, I come to beg you to tell me in what manner I have offended you, for I see you are quite changed toward me, and not only you, but your daughters. Miss Theo—"

At the mention of his daughter's name, Jonathan's brow darkened.

"Just so!" he said. "You are right. My opinion of you *has* changed!"

"But why?—what have I done?" asked Rupert.

Jonathan looked at him keenly, and the honest, open face and truthful eyes of the young man seemed for a moment to stagger him.

"You must excuse me, Halsham," he said, "if I find your question difficult to answer. But I beg you to remember a—a conversation you had not long since with my daughter, Bettina."

Rupert's face changed.

It was Bettina's doing, then!

Jonathan noticed the change.

"Ah!" said he; "your memory serves you, I see! You have done no wrong—committed no crime that society would blame you for, perhaps; but yet I, for one, can no longer look on you as a strictly honorable man!"

"What, in Heaven's name, have I done? Speak, sir! Why deal in innuendoes?" cried Rupert, hotly. "Tell me, at least, my fault!"

Jonathan was silent for a moment. Then he said, in a low voice, "Do you think it was straightforward and honorable to enter my house under false colors?—to—"

"Van Bolt explained how my error arose!" cried Rupert, eagerly.

"Your error? Oh, about their name! That is not to what I refer. But, to be plain, do you not think it would have been better had you told my daughters or their aunt from the first that you were an engaged man?" And a red flush rose to Jonathan's cheek. "In America, engaged men do not hang about after young girls and—"

"But you are mistaken—utterly mistaken!" cried Rupert. "I am not engaged!"

"Not engaged! Do you pretend to say that you did not tell Miss Falconer that your heart—if not your hand"—(and he said this with a cruel sneer)—"was your own no longer?"

"True!" replied Rupert; "my heart is mine no longer! It is on this very subject I wish to speak to you, sir. I love your daughter Theo! I am no longer a poor man, sir; and if I have your permission to address her—"

"You love Theo! There must have been some strange mistake, then!" cried Jonathan, his face brightening. "Bettina was under the impression that you were engaged to an old love in Dorsetshire!"

"I cannot imagine why!" he answered, warmly. "It is Theo I love—I have never loved but her!"

"It is false!" cried a sharp, angry voice behind them; and the curtains that separated the two drawing-rooms were thrown aside, and Bettina, with flashing eyes and a face as pale as death, entered.

Rupert started back as she appeared, and Jonathan looked the picture of surprise.

"Bettina," he said, "this is no place for you! Leave me to talk to Mr. Halsham alone!"

"Papa, do not listen to him!" she cried, madly. "He does not love Theo!—he never cared for her! But three weeks ago he told me he loved another! Ah, tremble and turn pale! You well may, deceiver! Go!—quit the house!—or I will tell all—all!"

"Bettina," cried Jonathan, looking from her frenzied face to Rupert's pale, astonished countenance, "you had better speak plainly! Tell me—pronounce at once the name of the lady whom a few days ago he honored with his affections, before he thought of doing me the honor of offering them to my daughter."

"Yes, speak!" cried Rupert; "for, by the Heaven above us, you know as well as I that it is your sister I love!"

She laughed a hard, scornful laugh.

"Shall I really name her?" she cried, mockingly.

Rupert bowed.

"It was *me*, then—*me*!" she cried, in a burst of wrath. "Yes; knowing I was engaged to Gustave, father, he dared to speak to me of love!"

And she stood before him, her figure drawn up to its full height, and the smile of a mocking demon on her face.

"Have you—do you pretend to have—forgotten all that passed between us that evening?" she continued, her face distorted with anger. "Do you pretend that it was my sister you loved, when you entreated me to forget my engagement to Mr. Van Bolt, and become your wife—*your* wife?"

And she looked at him with withering contempt.

Almost too much astonished to reply, Rupert could only stammer out a few disjointed words.

"Ah!" she continued, violently, "you have



nothing to say—no reply to make! Look at him, father!—see, he cannot answer me, or say a word in his defense!”

And she pointed triumphantly at Rupert.

“This warmth on your part is hardly necessary, Bettina,” said Jonathan, bewildered at his daughter’s violence. “I can imagine your feeling intense indignation at the man’s audacity; but calm yourself, Bettina, and leave me to deal with him.”

“But let him answer me, father! Speak!” she cried; “confess it! Tell my father there how I spurned you—how I bade you leave me forever!”

“Heaven forgive you, Miss Falconer!” he answered, solemnly—“Heaven forgive you! You know that what you say is false—that I addressed no word of love to *you*—that I told you clearly enough my love was—”

“Silence!” she cried. “Papa, can you stand by and hear him charge me with falsehood? Out of my sight, I tell you!”

And she pointed to the door with an imperious gesture.

But Rupert did not stir.

Jonathan stood looking irresolutely from one to the other.

“Miss Falconer,” said Rupert, “you well know that you are speaking falsely! Cousin, I leave you; but time will show—time will soften her heart; and then, maybe, she will speak the truth! I will go now!”

“Perhaps it is the best thing you can do, sir!” said Jonathan, tartly. “I cannot disbelieve my daughter’s word, sir; and, believing it, need hardly say that I decline altogether to accept you as a suitor for my daughter’s hand. And had I known this of you before, you should never have darkened my doors again! Now go—leave them forever!”

“Father!—father!” cried a wailing voice; “it is not—it cannot be true! Oh, Rupert, Rupert! say it is not true!”

And Theo, the tears streaming down her cheeks, appeared in the doorway.

“Theo! What are you doing here?” cried Jonathan, angrily.

But Rupert had caught her in his arms, and was pressing her frantically to his heart.

“Unhand her, sir!” he continued, coming forward. “Child, you cannot doubt your sister’s word?”

But Theo heard him not; she had fainted; and it was her insensible form that Jonathan wrested from her lover’s arms.

“Go!—out of my house!” he cried to Rupert. “Let me never see you more!”

And with a sad, yearning look at the pale, insensible Theo, and an aching, indignant heart, Rupert left the house, pursued by a glance of malicious triumph from Bettina’s cruel eyes, and with the sound of her harsh, mocking laughter ringing in his ears.

She was right. She had, indeed, had her revenge; and was she not “a woman scorned?”

Yet, when Jonathan thought over what had happened calmly that evening, he felt far from satisfied with himself—still less satisfied with Bettina; and a vague distrust of her, and a feeling that he had done his kinsman injustice, filled his breast, and for many an hour drove sleep from his eyelids.

## CHAPTER X.

### CONFESSED.

THE wedding was a grand one—after Bettina’s own heart. The breakfast was magnificent, the presents of the most costly description. Eight bridesmaids followed to the altar the fair bride, who, arrayed in satin, lace, and diamonds, took her place calmly and proudly beside the bridegroom, and in a low but steady voice repeated the words of the marriage service.

The guests were numerous, and of rank and fashion, and drove up to the church door in grand carriages, drawn by prancing horses. Outwardly everything was as it should be—nothing went wrong. What mattered it if the bride’s heart were filled with hatred and jealousy, and that her father’s brow was gloomy and anxious, or the face of the sister bridesmaid pale and tear-stained? Of course, the poor girl felt parting with her only sister, and a father must always feel anxiety respecting his daughter’s future, even when she is making such a first-rate marriage as that of Bettina Falconer—youth, beauty, family, and money on one side, and an adoring husband, with untold wealth, on the other. What but happiness would be the result of such a marriage?

So the world judged; and as Bettina left the church leaning on Van Bolt’s arm, many an envious glance was cast at her, and many a one wished their luck were as good as hers, as she entered her carriage, and was driven away to her father’s house in Belgrave Square.

But, as they rapidly turned the corner, Bettina caught sight of a melancholy figure, which sent a pang through her heart; and she fell back and pulled down the blind of the carriage window, as if to shut it out from her sight.

“What is it, darling?” asked poor Van Bolt, whose honest heart was at that moment filled with intense happiness; for was not Bettina his own now, forever?

“People will stare so,” she replied, pettishly. “Do let the other blind down, Gustave!”

And Gustave obeyed, and was rewarded by a sweet smile of thanks from his bride.

It was Rupert she had seen—Rupert who, without remembering it was the fifteenth, her wedding day, had wandered toward Belgrave Square in the hope of catching a glance of Theo; and as the carriage in which she was drove past, he was rewarded by seeing her



pale face flush, and her eyes sparkle as she returned his salutation.

"She loves me, spite of all," he thought; and for a moment his heart beat joyfully, and then it fell again. Without her father's consent he felt she would never marry him; and would Jonathan ever relent?—would Bettina's accusation ever be proved to be false? Ah! how could she stand beside the altar, and enter on her new life with the weight of such a lie on her soul, and hope for happiness? That evening the newly-married pair started for Paris, and Theo and her father were left alone in their great London house.

"I hope your sister will be happy," said Jonathan, musingly, as they sat together in the grand drawing-room, that looked empty and deserted now that all the guests had departed.

"I hope so, indeed," replied Theo, with a little sigh, and in a tone so sad that Jonathan looked at her anxiously.

"What is it, my little girl?" he said, coming over to her. "You are always so sad and grave now, Theo. Can't you forget, darling, a man who—"

"Hush, father!" cried Theo, laying her little hand on his lips. "Do not speak about that. I cannot bear it."

"But I must speak, dear. I cannot bear to see you grieving after a fellow whom, knowing what we do know, we cannot think worthy of you," he replied.

Theo was silent. At last she whispered, "What do we know, father?"

He started, and looked at her in surprise.

"Theo, you know what Bettina told us," he said.

"Yes, father, I know," she replied.

"Well, what more is required to prove that he is base and dishonorable, my child?" he cried. "You cannot doubt your sister's word?"

But Theo made no reply, and presently, rising from her seat, she crossed over to where her father sat, and, kissing him softly on the forehead, whispered, "I know I love him, father—can never love another; and—and—that I could never love a dishonorable man."

And without a word further she quitted the room, leaving Jonathan still more perplexed and dissatisfied with himself and Bettina than ever.

In a fortnight the newly-married pair returned. The bride could not be prevailed upon to quit the gay capital sooner, and their departure to America had to be put off till a week later than had been originally intended; so that it came to pass that Rupert, who had altered his passage to the steamer of the second, thinking it best to avoid sailing in the same vessel with them, found, half an hour

after the steamer had got well out to sea, that Jonathan, Theo, and the Van Bolts were all on board.

"I can keep out of their way," he thought, sadly, as he saw Bettina beside her husband, leaning over the taffrail, and Jonathan standing near her; but hardly had the words passed through his mind than he felt a timid little hand laid on his arm, and saw Theo's sweet face beside him.

"My love," he said, taking both her hands in his, "you do not shun me, then; you do not believe—"

"Should I be here if I did?" she answered, softly. "I—I came to tell you, Rupert, to ask you not to think if—if I avoid you, that it is because I do not—because I am changed toward you. That can never be; but my father—"

"I know, darling—I understand. Ah, Theo! if you love me, and will be true to me, all will yet be well with us. I feel it."

"I will be true to you forever, Rupert!" she replied. "Ah, do not doubt me! Some day all this trouble will pass away. Bettina will repent, and tell the truth. Ah, why has she behaved so to us? I can not understand it; but she must repent some day, Rupert! She is so happy herself that she will have pity on our suffering!"

For Theo, innocent and guileless as a child, had not realized the motives that had induced her sister—vain, selfish and passionate as she was—to act as she had done.

"Yes, my love!" answered Rupert; "we must trust to time to soften her heart! Oh, my brave darling, how good and true you are!" And he kissed the little hand that lay in his. "You, dearest, have never doubted me."

"No; not for an instant," replied Theo, firmly, "and never shall! Only trust me as I trust you, Rupert, and all will yet come right. My father is a just man, Rupert. Some day he will discover how greatly he has wronged you, and when that day comes will not refuse to make us happy!"

And for a few short moments the lovers stood hand in hand, watching the outlines of the English coast as they faded away in the distance; and then, with a last loving farewell, she went silently below to her cabin, and Rupert, with a heart full of happiness, sat on deck till the moon had sunk, hoping that the time might not be far distant when the cloud that was overshadowing him might be lifted, and show a silver lining. And then he retired to his berth and fell quietly asleep.

He was awakened a few hours after by the rushing of many feet, and the sound of many excited voices; and in a moment more that most fearful of all words that can be spoken at sea was shouted by a dozen agonized voices—"Fire! fire! the ship is on fire!" and a chorus



of shrieks and cries arose from the affrighted passengers, who, aroused from their slumbers by the tumult, rushed, half-clothed, from their cabins, and gathered on the crowded decks.

Dense smoke rose in huge black columns from the fore-hatch, and the wind drove it in blinding, choking clouds aft, over the quickly-assembled crowd of sailors and passengers on the main and quarter decks. The captain was at his post, giving orders in a clear, collected voice; while the ship's officers were doing their best to keep order among the terrified passengers, and prevent a rush being made on the boats that were being lowered, for it was plain that the fire on board could not, by any possibility, be extinguished, and that the only chance for passengers and crew was to take to the boats, and trust themselves to the mercy of the great deep.

It was a terrible alternative, for the sky was black with hurrying clouds, and the wind blew in fitful gusts, as if a storm were near. A fearful cry arose from the shivering crowd on the main-deck, and the flames shot up high into the air, as, with a terrific crash, the fore-mast fell. The good ship groaned and reeled with the shock, and the angry flames danced and quivered as if in mocking sport, and rose with a fierce red glare against the dark sky, hissing and crackling with redoubled vehemence, as a heap of loose spars and sails that had lain near the main-hatch became ignited, and the shrinking crowd retreated in a compact mass toward the quarter-deck.

What a scene of horror and confusion it was! Mothers seeking frantically amidst the crowd for their missing children, husbands calling for their wives, children for their fathers, cries, groans, and sobs on all sides; while, in the midst of all the tumult, the sailors and officers of the ship, grimed with smoke and scorched with the flames, came and went sternly and steadily in the performance of their duties, with grave, firmly-set faces, and eager, determined mien, well calculated (if aught could have done it) to inspire confidence in the frightened crowd around them.

Standing by the wheel, giving orders, was the captain, and there he stood when the last overcrowded boat was rowed away from the side, refusing to leave his post till all were safely off; and so, doing duty to the last, he perished, and went down with the wreck of the burning vessel.

Hastily throwing on his clothes, and with an agony of terror as he thought of Theo, Rupert hastened on deck, and sought her in the crowd; but she was not to be found.

Descending again, he rushed to the now almost deserted saloon, and there he found her, with her father and Van Bolt vainly endeavor-

ing to induce Bettina to follow them on deck, for she, mad with terror, was clinging frantically to her husband, uttering piercing cries and shrieks.

"Come away—come on deck, Bettina!" cried Gustave, catching her in his arms. "I tell you we must take to the boats. They are being lowered, and—"

"The boats!" she shrieked. "We shall be drowned! Oh, father! Gustave! save me! Theo, save me!"

And she struggled desperately to free herself from her husband's arms, while dense clouds of smoke began to fill the saloon, and the ship rolled heavily in the angry sea.

"Ah, Rupert—Rupert—Halsham!" she cried, as Rupert came up to her. "You are revenged now—revenged on me for the falsehood I uttered. Forgive me! Save me!"

And she stretched out her arms wildly toward him.

"For Heaven's sake, take Theo away, up on deck. The long-boat is being lowered," said Rupert to Jonathan.

And even in this terrible moment he could not help feeling a secret thrill of joy that Bettina, in her agony of fear, had confessed her falsehood.

"I will stay and help Van Bolt," he added.

And, without a word, Jonathan turned away, and seizing Theo, by the arm, hurried with her on deck.

With Rupert's aid Gustave succeeded in dragging the frantic Bettina on deck, and to the side of the ship; but when she saw the roaring flames, and the clouds of black, wreathing smoke that arose from the burning ship, and the scared, appalled human beings around her, and heard their piercing screams and the groans of the burnt and injured (they were many), mingled with the shouts of the sailors and the crash of falling timbers, together with the whistling and moaning of the wind, she fought more violently than ever to free herself from their grasp; and just as Van Bolt had taken his place in the boat, and was preparing to receive her from Rupert's arms, she broke away, and fled screaming toward the saloon, now a mass of flames.

Rupert followed; but before he overtook her, a spark had fallen on her dressing-gown, and already she was enveloped in flames. Without an instant's hesitation, Rupert tore off his coat, and wrapped it round her, carried her in his arms to the side of the ship, and plunged with her headlong into the sea.

It was a hard swim—and only a desperate man would have attempted it—to the long-boat, now some hundred yards or more from the ship; but Rupert, scorched and wounded as he was, accomplished it, and succeeded in placing the insensible form of Bettina in her



husband's arms, and was then himself dragged, exhausted and almost insensible, into the boat, which was then rowed away swiftly from the burning vessel.

Hour after hour passed, and the pitiless sea drove them hither and thither, as if it would fain swallow up what the flames had spared; and, wet and weary, the survivors of the ill-fated City of New York saw the sun rise and shine on the white cliffs, still some four or five miles distant from them.

"A long pull yet," said the officer, who was steering; "but, please Heaven, we shall all be ashore again soon, if the wind doesn't freshen."

And he looked anxiously at the crowded boat, whose gunwale was at times almost on a level with the water.

"We couldn't live in a bad sea," he continued, to himself, with a look of anxiety at the clouds overhead and to windward.

And it was yet several hours ere the weary survivors of the last night's catastrophe set foot on the shores of their native land again; and then two bodies—those of a poor baby and a young sailor, who had been injured by a falling mast—and the still insensible form of Bettina Van Bolt were carried from the boat to the nearest inn in the little village, close to which the passengers and crew of the ill-fated steamer were at length landed.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

FOR many a day did Bettina, maimed, and scorched, and raving in delirium, lay helplessly on her bed in the little village inn, attended night and day by her husband and Theo; all her beauty gone, and her life despaired of—the shock, the terror that had so overpowered her, more than the mere injuries she had received in the burning ship, had brought on the fever to which, to all appearances, she would succumb.

Gustave was indefatigable in his attentions to his sick wife. He never left her bedside day or night, and was always at hand, and ready to attend to the slightest want of the invalid.

Theo, who had always liked him for his sterling good qualities, though she had never thought him good enough for her beautiful sister, grew to love and admire him as the days passed on.

His tender care and loving patience, the intense affection he showed for his wife, won her respect and admiration, and forced her to allow that if Van Bolt's exterior and manners were a trifle rough, his heart was in the right place, and was a noble one.

At last the fever left Bettina, and, worn to a shadow, she opened her eyes to a sense of her

surroundings again, and a feeble smile of recognition fluttered over her wasted countenance as her glance rested on the anxious face of her husband bending over her.

"Gustave!" she whispered.

"Ah! thank Heaven she knows me again!" he cried, and two large tears rolled down his cheeks. "Bettina, my love!"

"Where am I? What has happened?" said she. "Have I been ill, Gustave?"

"Very ill, darling. Hush! You must not talk. Drink this, and try to sleep," he answered.

Too weak to resist, Bettina did as she was told, and fell into a sound slumber, from which she awoke after several hours—saved!

"Time and ordinary care will cure her now, my dear sir," said the doctor. "With two such good nurses as you and Miss Theo, I can leave her without anxiety."

"What, Theo? Is Theo here?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, love. Now don't agitate yourself. Here she is!" replied Van Bolt, as Theo entered, and in obedience to a sign, he followed the doctor from the room.

"She does not remember any thing as yet, then?" he said. "She does not know?"

"She knows nothing," replied Van Bolt, sadly. "My poor—poor darling. She was so beautiful, doctor! She does not know her beauty is gone—forever." And he turned away to hide his emotion.

Yes, it was too true. The cruel flames had not spared the unfortunate girl. Her face, and neck, and arms were horribly scorched by the fire, and the lovely hair that had been her pride and delight, and the transparent pink and white complexion that she had been so proud of, were marred and injured past all recovery.

Poor Bettina! She was ignorant of the terrible misfortune that had happened to her, as yet. How would she bear the discovery of it?

As the days passed slowly on, and her strength gradually came to her again, the remembrance of all that had passed came vividly before her, and she knew that she had in her terror betrayed her secret, and acknowledged that as regarded herself and Rupert she had spoken falsely.

An angry shame filled her soul as she thought of what had passed. How could she face her father again?—to say nothing of Theo; and what would Gustave think of what she had said?

But Gustave had been far too full of anxiety to heed his wife's half-frantic exclamations on that fearful night and her words had fallen unheeded on his ear; but with Jonathan it was far otherwise. In a moment, even in the



midst of the terrors that surrounded him, he had understood everything, and for the first time Bettina had appeared to him in her true colors; and from the bottom of his heart he pitied poor Van Bolt, and would have given worlds if the work of the fifteenth could have been undone again, and he could have prevented him from taking a heartless wife to his bosom.

"Theo, I understand all now," he had whispered to his child, as he kissed her and blessed her the morning they landed from the boat. "Rupert, forgive me; I have wronged you! She is yours."

And he placed Theo's hand in his.

"Take her," he said. "She is a treasure, and you are worthy of her."

"And I may tell her—" began Rupert.

"Tell her what?" cried Jonathan. "Ah! I am forgetting—that you are one of us—a Falconer. Yes, my little Theo; you will not have to change your name, as you imagined, for Rupert Halsbam is my cousin, Rupert Falconer, who—"

"What! our cousin, who was once owner of Hale," cried Theo, in astonishment, "whom we dispossessed?"

"Yes, Theo," he answered.

"And—and you love me?" she faltered. "You do not hate us?"

"Hate you?—no; I guess he doesn't, Theo," said Jonathan, slyly.

And Rupert took her in his arms, and pressed her to his heart, calling her by every endearing name he could think of; and after the troubles, and terrors, and trials of the past few weeks, oh, how sweet she found it to lay her head once more in peace and security on his breast, and to feel that there was no barrier between them now—that she was his forever!

The fact of Rupert's presence at the village of Greycliff was kept a secret from Bettina by both Theo and her father, and happily Gustave did not think of mentioning his name; nevertheless, he was often in Bettina's thoughts.

"Theo will marry him now, I suppose," she mused. "Well, it doesn't much matter. When I am well again I shall manage to forget him, no doubt; but, oh, I wish—I wish I had not betrayed myself that horrid night!"

And she shuddered as the weird, awful scene on board the burning ship rose before her.

"Gustave!" she cried; and her patient, ever-ready husband came to her side. "Gustave, were all my jewels lost in that wretched ship?" she asked, fretfully.

"Yes; all, love. But don't think of them. What do the jewels matter when you are safe? We can get others."

And he sighed as he thought what a mockery it would now be to deck the once fair form of Bettina with jewels.

"I wish they were here," she continued, in a complaining voice. "I should like to try on that set of pearls I bought in Paris. I can sit up now, and it would have amused me to look at them. It's awfully dull lying here all day, Gustave, with nothing to amuse me and the room so dark. Why do you keep the window-curtains closed? Do let in a little light."

Gustave rose to obey.

"Enough, enough!" she cried, when he had drawn back one. "The light hurts me. I've been so long in darkness. Now prop me up a little."

And, when he had done so, she sat looking thoughtfully around the room.

"What a poor, wretched place!" she exclaimed; "not fit to live in, I declare!"

And then her eyes fell on her scarred hands and arms; and, with a start, she looked at them attentively.

Gustave saw her, and the tears filled his eyes, and he trembled for what would follow.

Slowly she raised the poor injured hands, and examined the marks the cruel fire had left on them, and then passed them over her face.

"Gustave," she whispered, trembling violently, "what is it? Am I much burnt? Am I—oh, for Heaven's sake, tell me!—am I all like this?"

And she pointed to the scars on her thin, wasted hands.

Gustave was silent; his emotion choked him.

"My poor darling!" he said, at last; "my poor love!"

And he put his arms round her.

"Speak, speak!" she cried, in a sort of shrinking agony. "Oh, Gustave, tell me—has the fire—am I disfigured by the flames?" And, with a sudden wild movement, she raised herself to a sitting posture in the bed and pushed back the bandages that were tied around her head and neck. "Give me a glass—a looking-glass!" she cried, wildly.

"No, Bettina—no, darling! Wait, I implore you!" cried Gustave. "As time goes on, these marks will disappear."

"A looking-glass, I tell you! I will know the worst at once!" she cried, in hoarse, excited tones, and struggled to leave the bed.

"Bettina, be warned!" cried Van Bolt. "Be advised and wait."

But it was too late. Hardly had the words left his mouth, than the cloth with which the dressing-glass on the little table at the foot of the bed had been covered, and which, by the undrawing of the window curtains had become disarranged, slipped down, and Bettina saw herself clearly reflected in it in all her terrible ugliness. The once fair, delicate face all scarred and furrowed; the pink and white



complexion turned to a dull, bluish red; the long eyelashes and delicately-penciled eyebrows gone, and the snowy neck and shoulders covered with angry burns.

With a terrible cry, she fell back, and buried her face in her pillows, sobbing and trembling.

"My poor love—my darling!" said Gustave, taking the disfigured hands in his, tenderly.

"Oh, Bettina! Why did you not wait?"

"Wait!" she replied, in a dull, hollow voice; "wait! What for? I shall always be so. I know it now. Oh, why did you not leave me to perish on that dreadful ship? A thousand times better to die than to live a loathsome, hideous object as I am now. Let me die! let me die! Oh, Heaven! that is all I ask now!"

"What, Bettina, would you die, and leave us all—leave me who love you so?" said Gustave, gently and sadly.

But Bettina laughed scornfully.

"Love—you love me—a vile, hideous creature? No, no! Every one must hate me now! Oh, it is cruel, wicked! What have I ever done that such a fearful thing should happen to me?"

And she moaned and wept bitterly; and Gustave, sitting by, wept too, the more because he felt he was powerless to lessen one iota of her grief.

"Bettina! Bettina!" he murmured. "If you love me as I love you, this trouble would not be such an overwhelming one, great as it is. To me, love, you will be always beautiful—always the same!"

But Bettina heeded him not, and ere night fell she was again tossing and moaning on her pillow, a prey to the fever, from whose grasp she had been but so lately rescued.

"It was unfortunate," said the doctor, "very unfortunate. I feared the shock, and had hoped she might not discover the truth till she had got stronger."

"And will she be always so, doctor?" asked Theo, pityingly.

"Time will, of course, make some change, my dear young lady," replied the old man; "but I fear your sister will never recover her complexion, and it may be years before the scars disappear."

"Poor Bettina!" sighed Theo, as she busied herself beside her sister's bed; "but Gustave loves her all the same, I know, just as I should love Rupert if he were so, instead of Bettina. So I hope in time she will be comforted; but it will be a terrible trial to her. She was so beautiful, and now—"

For many days they feared for Bettina's life, and often her words, "Oh, Heaven! let me die!" rung in her husband's ears.

It almost seemed as if her prayer was to be granted, and that death would put an end to her sufferings. But youth and careful nursing

triumphed, and in a few weeks' time Bettina was able to leave her bed.

But she was dull, and spiritless, and hopeless. Nothing interested her, and except her husband, her father, and Theo, she refused to see any one.

"I cannot," she said, when, after their return to London, several friends begged to visit her—"I cannot see them, Gustave. Do not urge me."

And now she was never happy out of Gustave's sight. His devotion to her was unbounded, and at last touched her heart, and she felt, and could not but acknowledge, that with such a noble, loving husband, there might yet be a life of happiness before her, even although her beauty, which, formerly, was the only thing she cared for, was destroyed, and gone forever from her.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MASTER OF HALE.

So when Bettina was sufficiently restored to health, she and Gustave set sail again for America; and this time reached Boston without accident. There they settled down quietly, and Bettina, though her life was far different to what she had anticipated in the early days of her marriage, found far truer happiness in the quiet discharge of her daily duties than she would have had in the brilliant, hollow, fashionable existence she had looked forward to in her former days.

And as for Van Bolt—not in the whole of America could a better, or happier, or more prosperous man have been found than he.

He cannot help feeling that since Bettina's misfortune she has learned to love him far better than in the days of her beauty, and though he would give worlds were it possible to restore to her all that she has lost, yet he cannot help feeling that his home is happier with Bettina always in it than it would have been had she been perpetually flying about from one party to another, or filling his house each evening with a throng of fashionable acquaintances; and as Bettina appeared content, and never expressed a desire for any society save that of their intimate friends, and seemed never so happy as with him alone, he had nothing left to desire.

A few months after the Van Bolts had left England, and a week or two before the wedding of Rupert and Theo was to take place, news reached Jonathan Falconer of the death of his only son.

Theo came into the study at the Hale Castle and found him, one morning, with an open letter before him, and his face sad and grave.

"Read it, my dear!" he said, as Theo hastened to inquire the cause of his trouble. "You were young when your unfortunate



brother left us; but you can remember him. He is gone, dear! I have no son now." And Jonathan buried his face in his hands; and all the grief, and shame, and sorrow the wayward son, in his youth and manhood, had cost his father were forgotten.

He could remember and think of his son only as the innocent babe he had carried in his arms; the child who had loved and clung to him; the merry, frank school-boy who had been his joy and delight; for his faults and errors, and crimes were all forgotten now, and blotted out by death.

There was a long silence between father and daughter, till, at length, Jonathan spoke, and told his sorrowing child many a story of her brother's early days.

"He was a fine boy, Theo, our only son. Your poor mother idolized him. His first error broke her heart and I think he knew it; but the knowledge, instead of softening, only made him harder and more desperate, I think, and—you know what happened—I was forced to forbid him my house, and he was soon a marked man, and an outlaw. Well, Heaven forgive him, as I do—as I have done long, long ago!"

Theo's wedding morning dawned clear and bright; the earth was gay with spring flowers; the trees wore their freshest livery of green leaves; the hedges were white with May; and every wood and thicket rung with the song of birds.

When she descended to the drawing room, clad in her white robes, her delicate figure enveloped in a dainty vail of white lace, she looked so fair and lovely that even Jonathan gazed at her with wonder.

"Why, my little Theo," he said, "we never

reckoned you as a beauty in the Falconer family; but I think we must all have been blind. The Castle will have a winsome lady for its mistress, child."

And he kissed her tenderly.

For, from this day, Theo and Rupert are to be the owners of Hale. Jonathan has given it to Theo as a wedding portion, bequeathing his property in America to Bettina at his death.

"I have no son, Rupert; to leave it to. You are its natural owner, somehow, and I have always felt like a usurper here. I shall think that you are in your right place when you are master here again; and, as for me, America is my country, sir; and when I return to my old home and my old life, I shall feel as if I, too, were in my right place once more. So, when you and Theo have settled down, I shall go home again, and mind my affairs. Nay, no thanks; it's simple justice I'm doing, and my duty, and pleasing myself into the bargain."

So Rupert is lord and master of Hale Castle once more, with the dearest, sweetest little wife for a companion that ever man had. His property in America he sold for a large sum, with which he is able to make many improvements on his estate, which is now one of the largest and finest in the south of England. He and Theo are as happy as the day is long; a son and heir has been born to them, and a baby daughter plays on her mother's knee.

"How pleased father will be with her, Rupert!" says Theo; "and, as for the boy, grandpapa will just spoil him, I know!"

"And when will grandpa' come, mamma?" asks the boy, eagerly.

"Next week, darling!" she replies. "Ah, how happy we shall all be together!"

And next week sees Jonathan among them, and Theo's anticipations are realized.

THE END.



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